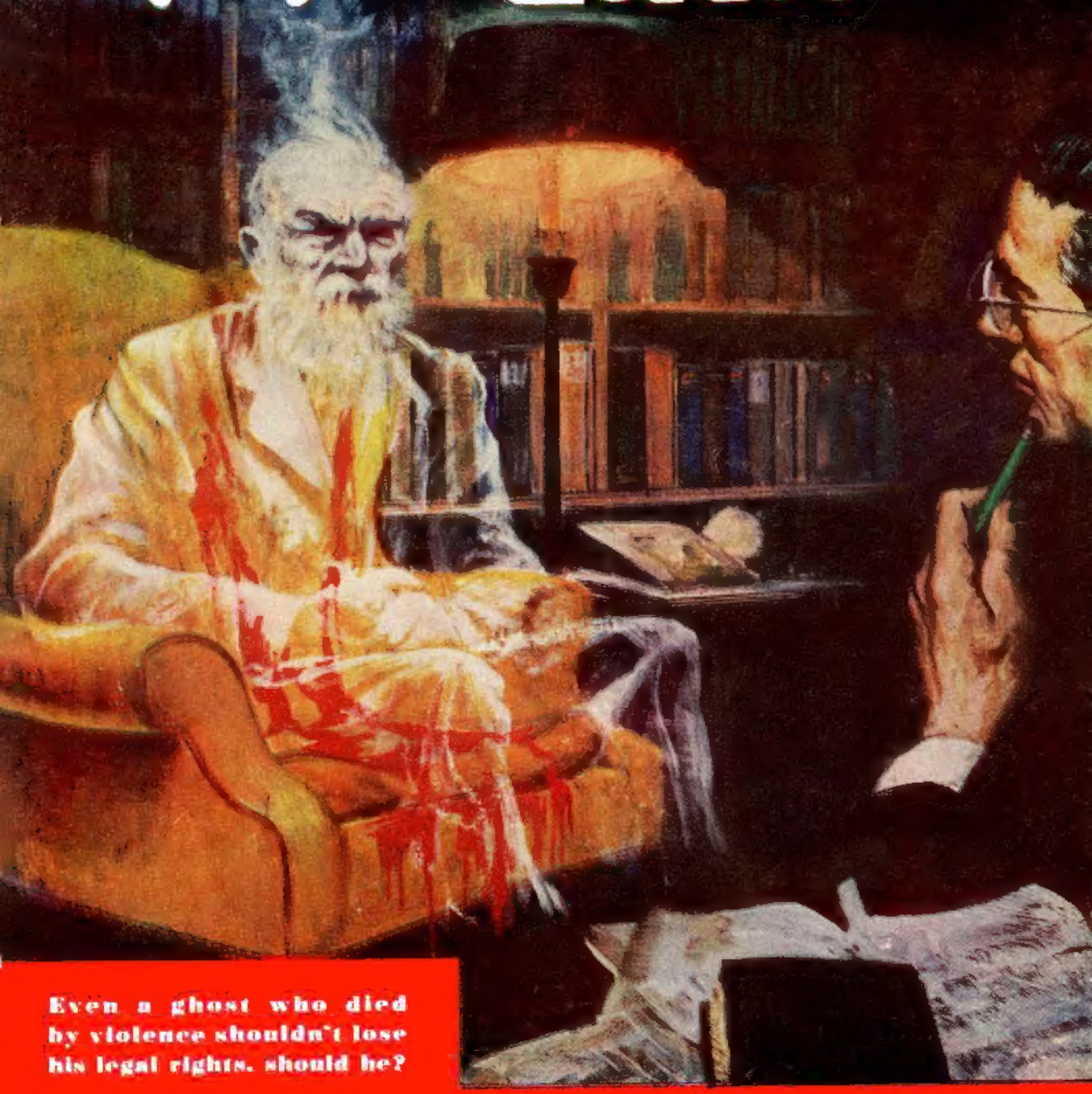
SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

25¢



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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

SEPTEMBER, 1950 Cover by Bill Wayne

NOVELETTE

LEGAL RITES . . . . . Isaac Asimov and James MacCreagh 8

"The fact that I was once killed by violence doesn't mean that I have lost my legal rights, does it?"

SHORT STORIES

THE PINEYS . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 26

Rumor had it that the Pineys were horrible all right, but that they weren't really people. They lived around longleaf districts and have lived there since the beginning of time.

THE SHADOW FROM THE STEEPLE . . . . . Robert Bloch 34

. . . assailed by a curious psychic disturbance, he seemed to see "visions of other lands and the gulfs beyond the stars." And then there appeared the creature of darkness who could not survive light.

THE MIRROR . . . . . Mildred Johnson 47

They were all there in the mirror—the husband whom she hated, and the sons she loved. For in that mirror one could see the dead.

UNKNOWN LADY . . . . . Harold Lawlor 54

Could there be any real reason why such a desirable house should be vacant in a housing shortage?

POTTS' TRIUMPH . . . . . August Derleth 64

The Laver sisters had wallpaper with sound effects. If you listened carefully it sounded as if someone far away were saying, "Let me out!"

THE SPANISH CAMERA . . . . . Carl Jacobi 70

It's one thing to focus your camera; another when it takes matters into its own hands and focuses itself.

THE THREE POOLS AND THE PAINTED MOON . . . . . Frank Owen 79

. . . Even as he struggled, Tang Ling regretted that he had painted his attacker with such an abundance of virility.

THE INSISTENT GHOST . . . . . Emil Petaja 84

She could feel those muddy gray, half blind eyes watching her as they had when he was alive.

VERSE

INCANTATION . . . . . Page Cooper 63

THE EYRIE 4

WEIRD TALES CLUB 83

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178

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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Well, Anyway He's Dead

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I observed in the "Weirdisms" department of your March, 1950 *issue what I conceive to be an inaccuracy. It is there stated as fact that Matthew Hopkins, the witchfinder, was tried and hanged. This conclusion differs from that ascribed as an end to Mr. Hopkins by The Rev. Montague Summers who, if anybody does, should know.*

I cite you to page 144 *of Summers' "Geography of Witchcraft," New York, Alfred A. Knopf,* 1927, *where it is stated:*

> . . . (Hopkins) died within the year at his old home in Manningtree. Stearne (Hopkins' chief aide) related that he passed away "peaceably, after a long sickness of a Consumption." ("Conformation and Discovery," London, 1648.) But Hutchinson tells us that Hopkins himself was seized upon by the irate people, accused of being a witch, and put to the water-ordeal, when he was drowned, and this is commonly accepted. Another story (J. T. Varden, East Anglian Handbook for 1885) said that Hopkins had stolen the Devil's roll of all the witches in England, and so was casting out Beelzebub by means of Beelzebub. Probably Stearne is correct, and the other tales merely show how infamous his name had become.

According to Summers, however Hopkins may have perished finally, it was not by hanging. Giving the third of his three hypotheses short shrift, it remains that he has decided from the evidence that Hopkins died a natural death—and at the outside was drowned while being "swum." I have cited Summers' sources from his own footnotes;

(*Continued on page* 6)

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The Eyrie

(*Continued from page* 4)

certainly Stearne deserves greater credence than one writing more than two centuries later.

I call this technicality to your attention in the interest of accuracy; the Weirdisms department is usually correct: this is the first time I have detected what might be an error.

Yours very truly,
Joseph V. Wilcox,
Washington, D. C.

We passed this letter on to Mr. Coye, who replied:

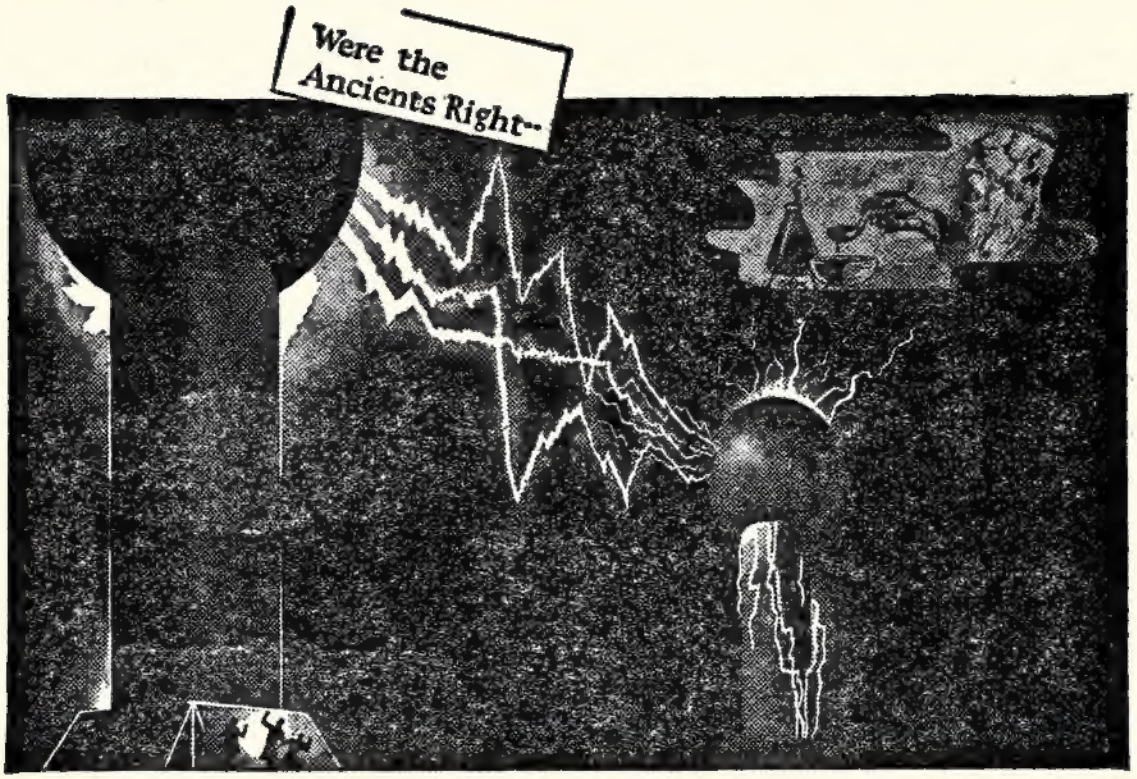
I have spent some time lately trying to track down the source of my statement that Mr. Hopkins was hung and have had very little success. I remember distinctly reading it in an old book of witchcraft and I am certain I did not get the idea from whole cloth. However, this will not satisfy a person who would write in about such a matter and I find in "Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft" by Sir Walter Scott, published in New York, 1831, *by J. J. Harper, the following on page* 222. *"But the popular indignation was so strongly excited, that some gentlemen seized on him, and put him to his own favorite experiment of swimming, on which, as he happened to float, he stood convicted of witchcraft, and so the country was rid of him." Whether he was drowned outright or not, does not exactly appear. . . . And so it seems since memory cannot be an established fact, I must relinquish my statement in favor of the record and apologize for misrepresentation of facts.*

I am still whacking away at Weirdisms and will have a batch of them very soon.

Lee Brown Coye.

Well, we think that might be regarded as that, except for the final paragraph of Mr. Coye's letter. Those of our readers who have inquired where WEIRDISMS has got to might take it literally and be looking for some sign

(*Continued on page* 95)



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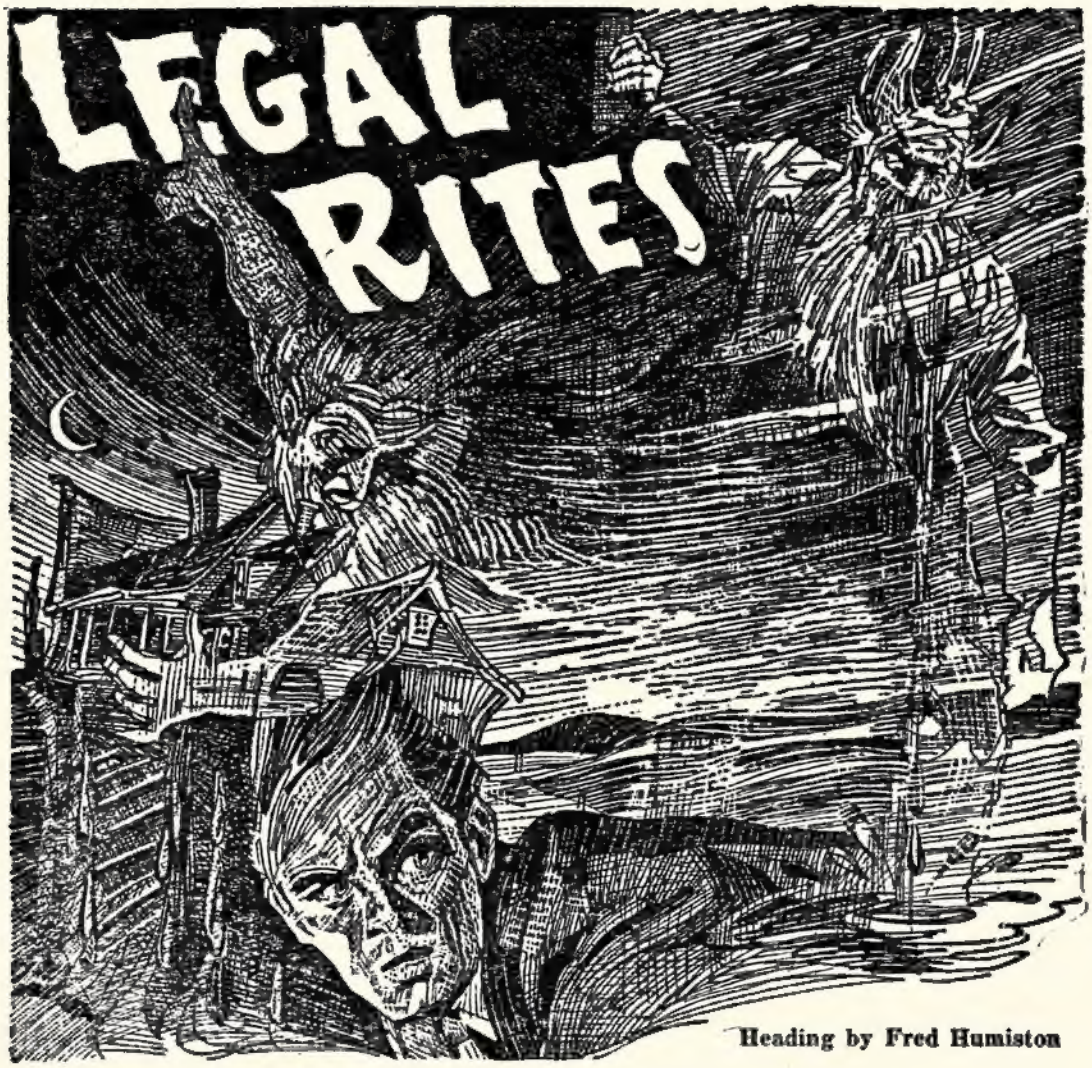

Heading by Fred Humiston

By Isaac Asimov and James MacCreagh

I

ALREADY the stars were out, though the sun had just dipped under the horizon, and the sky of the west was a blood-stuck gold behind the Sierra Nevadas.

"Hey!" squawked Russell Harley. "Come back!"

But the one-lunged motor of the old Ford was making too much noise; the driver didn't hear him. Harley cursed as he watched the old car careen along the sandy ruts on its half-flat tires. Its taillight was saying a red *no* to him. *No,* you can't get away tonight; *no,* you'll have to stay here and fight it out.

Harley grunted and climbed back up the porch stairs of the old wooden house. It was well made, anyhow. The stairs, though half a century old, neither creaked beneath him nor showed cracks.

Harley picked up the bags he'd dropped when he experienced his abrupt change of mind—fake leather and worn out, they were—and carted them into the house. He dumped them on a dust-jacketed sofa and looked around.

. . . a low order ghost can't materialize to any great density; but is or is not an astral entity a ghost?

It was stifling hot, and the smell of the desert outside had permeated the room. Harley sneezed.

"Water," he said out loud. "That's what I need."

He'd prowled through every room on the ground floor before he stopped still and smote his head. Plumbing—naturally there'd be no plumbing in this hole eight miles out on the desert! A well was the best he could hope for—

If that.

It was getting dark. No electric lights either, of course. He blundered irritatedly through the dusky rooms to the back of the house. The screen door shrieked metallically as he opened it. A bucket hung by the door. He picked it up, tipped it, shook the loose sand out of it. He looked over the "back yard"—about thirty thousand visible acres of hilly sand, rock and patches of sage and flame-tipped ocotillo.

No well.

The old fool got water from somewhere, he thought savagely. Obstinately he climbed down the back steps and wandered out into the desert. Overhead the stars were blinding, a million billion of them, but the sunset was over already and he could see only hazily. The silence was murderous. Only a faint whisper of breeze over the sand, and the slither of his shoes.

He caught a glimmer of starlight from the nearest clump of sage and walked to it. There was a pool of water, caught in the angle of two enormous boulders. He stared at it doubtfully, then shrugged. It was water. It was better than nothing. He dipped the bucket in the little pool. Knowing nothing of the procedure, he filled it

with a quart of loose sand as he scooped it along the bottom. When he lifted it, brimful, to his lips, staggering under the weight of it, he spat out the first mouthful and swore vividly.

Then he used his head. He set the bucket down, waited a second for the sand grains to settle, cupped water in his hands, lifted it to his lips. . . .

Pat. HISS. Pat. HISS. Pat. HISS—

"What the hell!" Harley stood up, looked around in abrupt puzzlement. It sounded like water dripping from somewhere, onto a red-hot stove, flashing into sizzling steam. He saw nothing, only the sand and the sage and the pool of tepid, sickly water.

Pat. HISS—

Then he saw it, and his eyes bulged. Out of nowhere it was dripping, a drop a second, a sticky, dark drop that was thicker than water, that fell to the ground lazily, in slow defiance of gravity. And when it struck each drop sizzled and skittered about, and vanished. It was perhaps eight feet from him, just visible in the starlight.

And then, "Get off my land!" said the voice from nowhere.

HARLEY got. By the time he got to Rebel Butte three hours later, he was barely managing to walk, wishing desperately that he'd delayed long enough for one more good drink of water, despite all the fiends of hell. But he'd run the first three miles. He'd had plenty of encouragement. He remembered with a shudder how the clear desert air had taken milky shape around the incredible trickle of dampness and had advanced on him threateningly.

And when he got to the first kerosene-lighted saloon of Rebel Butte, and staggered inside, the saloonkeeper's fascinated stare at the front of his shoddy coat showed him strong evidence that he hadn't been suddenly taken with insanity, or drunk on the unaccustomed sensation of fresh desert air. All down the front of him it was, and the harder he rubbed the harder it stayed, the stickier it got. Blood!

"Whiskey!" he said in a strangled voice, tottering to the bar. He pulled a threadbare dollar bill from his pocket, flapped it onto the mahogany.

The blackjack game at the back of the room had stopped. Harley was acutely conscious of the eyes of the players, the bartender and the tall, lean man leaning on the bar. All were watching him.

The bartender broke the spell. He reached for a bottle behind him without looking at it, placed it on the counter before Harley. He poured a glass of water from a jug, set it down with a shot glass beside the bottle.

"I could of told you that would happen," he said casually. "Only you wouldn't of believed me. You had to meet Hank for yourself before you'd believe he was there."

Harley remembered his thirst and drained the glass of water, then poured himself a shot of the whiskey and swallowed it without waiting for the chaser to be refilled. The whiskey felt good going down, almost good enough to stop his internal shakes.

"What are you talking about?" he said finally. He twisted his body and leaned forward across the bar to partly hide the stains on his coat. The saloonkeeper laughed.

"Old Hank," he said. "I knowed who you was right away, even before Tom came back and told me where he'd took you. I knowed you was Zeb Harley's no-good nephew, come to take Harley Hall an' sell it before he was cold in his grave."

The blackjack players were still watching him, Russell Harley saw. Only the lean man farther along the bar seemed to have dismissed him. He was pouring himself another drink, quite occupied with his task.

Harley flushed. "Listen," he said, "I didn't come in here for advice. I wanted a drink. I'm paying for it. Keep your mouth out of this."

The saloonkeeper shrugged. He turned his back and walked away to the blackjack table. After a couple of seconds one of the players turned too, and threw a card down. The others followed suit.

Harley was just getting set to swallow

his pride and talk to the saloonkeeper again—he seemed to know something about what Harley'd been through, and might be helpful—when the lean man tapped his shoulder. Harley whirled and almost dropped his glass. Absorbed and jumpy, he hadn't seen him come up.

"Young man," said the lean one, "my name's Nicholls. Come along with me, sir, and we'll talk this thing over. I think we may be of service to each other."

EVEN the twelve-cylinder car Nicholls drove jounced like a haywagon over the sandy ruts leading to the place old Zeb had—laughingly—named "Harley Hall."

Russell Harley twisted his neck and stared at the heap of paraphernalia in the open rumble seat. "I don't like it," he complained. "I never had anything to do with ghosts. How do I know this stuff'll work?"

Nicholls smiled. "You'll have to take my word for it. I've had dealings with ghosts before. You could say that I might qualify as a ghost exterminator, if I chose."

Harley growled. "I still don't like it."

Nicholls turned a sharp look on him. "You like the prospect of owning Harley Hall, don't you? And looking for all the money your late uncle is supposed to have hidden around somewhere?" Harley shrugged. "Certainly you do," said Nicholls, returning his eyes to the road. "And with good reason. The local reports put the figure pretty high, young man."

"That's where you come in, I guess," Harley said sullenly. "I find the money—that I own anyhow—and give some of it to you. How much?"

"We'll discuss that later," Nicholls said. He smiled absently as he looked ahead.

"We'll discuss it right now!"

The smile faded from Nicholls' face. "No," he said. "We won't. I'm doing you a favor, young Harley. Remember that. In return—you'll do as I say, all the way!"

Harley digested that carefully, and it was not a pleasant meal. He waited a couple of seconds before he changed the subject.

"I was out here once when the old man was alive," he said. "He didn't say nothing about any ghost."

"Perhaps he felt you might think him—well, peculiar," Nicholls said. "And perhaps you would have. When were you here?"

"Oh, a long time ago," Harley said evasively. "But I was here a whole day, and part of the night. The old man was crazy as a coot, but he didn't keep any ghosts in the attic."

"This ghost was a friend of his," Nicholls said. "The gentleman in charge of the bar told you that, surely. Your late uncle was something of a recluse. He lived in this house a dozen miles from nowhere, came into town hardly ever, wouldn't let anyone get friendly with him. But he wasn't exactly a hermit. He had Hank for company."

"Fine company."

NICHOLLS inclined his head seriously. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "From all accounts they got on well together. They played pinochle and chess—Hank's supposed to have been a great pinochle player. He was killed that way, according to the local reports. Caught somebody dealing from the bottom and shot it out with him. He lost. A bullet pierced his throat and he died quite bloodily." He turned the wheel, putting his weight into the effort, and succeeded in twisting the car out of the ruts of the "road," sent it jouncing across unmarked sand to the old frame house to which they were going.

"That," he finished as he pulled up before the porch, "accounts for the blood that accompanies his apparition."

Harley opened the door slowly and got out, looking uneasily at the battered old house. Nicholls cut the motor, got out and walked at once to the back of the car.

"Come on," he said, dragging things out of the compartment. "Give me a hand with this. I'm not going to carry this stuff all by myself."

Harley came around reluctantly, regarded the curious assortment of bundles of dried faggots, lengths of colored cord,

chalk pencils, ugly little bunches of wilted weeds, bleached bones of small animals and a couple of less pleasant things without pleasure.

Pat. HISS. Pat. HISS—

"He's here!" Harley yelped. "Listen! He's someplace around here watching us."

"Ha!"

The laugh was deep, unpleasant and—bodiless. Harley looked around desperately for the tell-tale trickle of blood. And he found it; from the air it issued, just beside the car, sinking gracefully to the ground and sizzling, vanishing, there.

"I'm watching you, all right," the voice said grimly. "Russell, you worthless piece of corruption, I've got no more use for you than you used to have for me. Dead or alive, this is my land! I shared it with your uncle, you young scalawag, but I won't share it with you. Get out!"

Harley's knees weakened and he tottered dizzily to the rear bumper, sat on it. "Nicholls—" he said confusedly.

"Oh, brace up," Nicholls said with irritation. He tossed a ball of gaudy twine, red and green, with curious knots tied along it, to Harley. Then he confronted the trickle of blood and made a few brisk passes in the air before it. His lips were moving silently, Harley saw, but no words came out.

There was a gasp and a chopped-off squawk from the source of the blood drops. Nicholls clapped his hands sharply, then turned to young Harley.

"Take that cord you have in your hands and stretch it around the house," he said. "All the way around, and make sure it goes right across the middle of the doors and windows. It isn't much, but it'll hold him till we can get the good stuff set up."

Harley nodded, then pointed a rigid finger at the drops of blood, now sizzling and fuming more angrily than before. "What about *that?*" he managed to get out.

Nicholls grinned complacently. "I'll hold him here till the cows come home," he said. "Get moving!"

Harley inadvertently inhaled a lungful of noxious white smoke and coughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks. When he recovered he looked at Nicholls, who was reading silently from a green leather book with dog-eared pages. He said, "Can I stop stirring this now?"

Nicholls grimaced angrily and shook his head without looking at him. He went on reading, his lips contorting over syllables that were not in any language Harley had ever heard, then snapped the book shut and wiped his brow.

"Fine," he said. "So far, so good." He stepped over to leeward of the boiling pot Harley was stirring on the hob over the fireplace, peered down into it cautiously.

"That's about done," he said. "Take it off the fire and let it cool a bit."

Harley lifted it down, then squeezed his aching biceps with his left hand. The stuff was the consistency of sickly green fudge.

"Now what?" he asked.

Nicholls didn't answer. He looked up in mild surprise at the sudden squawk of triumph from outside, followed by the howling of a chill wind.

"Hank must be loose," he said casually. "He can't do us any harm, I think, but we'd better get a move on." He rummaged in the dwindled pile of junk he'd brought from the car, extracted a paintbrush. "Smear this stuff around all the windows and doors. All but the front door. For that I have something else." He pointed to what seemed to be the front axle of an old Model-T. "Leave that on the doorsill. Cold iron. You can just step over it, but Hank won't be able to pass it. It's been properly treated already with the very best thaumaturgy."

"Step over it," Harley repeated. "What would I want to step over it for? *He's* out there."

"He won't hurt you," said Nicholls. "You will carry an amulet with you—that one, there—that will keep him away. Probably he couldn't really hurt you anyhow, being a low-order ghost who can't materialize to any great density. But just to take no chances, carry the amulet and don't stay out too long. It won't hold him off forever, not for more than half an hour. If you ever have to go out and stay for

any length of time, tie that bundle of herbs around your neck." Nicholls smiled. "That's only for emergencies, though. It works on the asafoetida principle. Ghosts can't come anywhere near it—but you won't like it much yourself. It has—ah—a rather definite odor."

He leaned gingerly over the pot again, sniffing. He sneezed.

"Well, that's cool enough," he said. "Before it hardens, get moving. Start spreading the stuff upstairs—and make sure you don't miss any windows."

"What are you going to do?"

"I," said Nicholls sharply, "will be here. Start."

But he wasn't. When Harley finished his disagreeable task and came down he called Nicholls' name, but the man was gone. Harley stepped to the door and looked out; the car was gone too.

He shrugged. "Oh, well," he said, and began taking the dust-cloths off the furniture.

II

SOMEWHERE within the cold, legal mind of Lawyer Turnbull, he weighed the comparative likeness of nightmare and insanity.

He stared at the plush chair facing him, noted with distinct uneasiness how the strangely weightless, strangely sourceless trickle of redness disappeared as it hit the floor, but left long, mud-ochre streaks matted on the upholstery. The sound was unpleasant too; *Pat. HISS. Pat. HISS*—

The voice continued impatiently, "Damn your human stupidity! I may be a ghost, but heaven knows I'm not trying to haunt you. Friend, you're not that important to me. Get this—I'm here on business."

Turnbull learned that you cannot wet dry lips with a dehydrated tongue. "Legal business?"

"Sure. The fact that I was once killed by violence, and have to continue my existence on the astral plane, doesn't mean I've lost my legal rights. Does it?"

The lawyer shook his head in bafflement. He said, "This would be easier on me if you weren't invisible. Can't you do something about it?"

There was a short pause. "Well, I could materialize for a minute," the voice said. "It's hard work—damn hard, for me. There are a lot of us astral entities that can do it easy as falling out of bed, but—Well, if I have to I shall try to do it once."

There was a shimmering in the air above the armchair, and a milky, thin smoke condensed into an intangible seated figure. Turnbull took no delight in noting that, through the figure, the outlines of the chair were still hazily visible. The figure thickened. Just as the features took form—just as Turnbull's bulging eyes made out a prominent hooked nose and a crisp beard—it thinned and exploded with a soft pop.

The voice said weakly, "I didn't think I was that bad. I'm way out of practice. I guess that's the first daylight materialization I've made in seventy-five years."

The lawyer adjusted his rimless glasses and coughed. *Hell's hinges,* he thought, *the worst thing about this is that I'm believing it!*

"Oh, well," he said aloud. Then he hurried on before the visitor could take offense: "Just what did you want? I'm just a small-town lawyer, you know. My business is fairly routine—"

"I know all about your business," the voice said. "You can handle my case—it's a land affair. I want to sue Russell Harley."

"Harley?" Turnbull fingered his cheek. "Any relation to Zeb Harley?"

"His nephew—and his heir, too."

Turnbull nodded. "Yes, I remember now. My wife's folks live in Rebel Butte, and I've been there. Quite a coincidence you should come to me—"

The voice laughed. "It was no coincidence," it said softly.

"Oh." Turnbull was silent for a second. Then, "I see," he said. He cast a shrewd glance at the chair. "Lawsuits cost money. Mr.—I don't think you mentioned your name?"

"Hank Jenkins," the voice prompted. "I

know that. Would—let's see. Would six hundred and fifty dollars be sufficient?"

Turnbull swallowed. "I think so," he said in a relatively unemotional tone—relative to what he was thinking.

"Then suppose we call that your retainer. I happen to have cached a considerable sum in gold when I was—that is to say, before I became an astral entity. I'm quite certain it hasn't been disturbed. You will have to call it treasure trove, I guess, and give half of it to the state, but there's thirteen hundred dollars altogether."

Turnbull nodded judiciously. "Assuming we can locate your trove," he said, "I think that would be quite satisfactory." He leaned back in his chair and looked legal. His aplomb had returned

And half an hour later he said slowly, "I'll take your case."

JUDGE Lawrence Gimbel had always liked his job before. But his thirteen honorable years on the bench lost their flavor for him as he grimaced wearily and reached for his gavel. This case was far too confusing for his taste.

The clerk made his speech, and the packed courtroom sat down en masse. Gimbel held a hand briefly to his eyes before he spoke.

"Is the counsel for the plaintiff ready?"

"I am, your honor." Turnbull, alone at his table, rose and bowed.

"The counsel for the defendant?"

"Ready, your honor!" Fred Wilson snapped. He looked with a hard flicker of interest at Turnbull and his solitary table, then leaned over and whispered in Russell Harley's ear. The youth nodded glumly, then shrugged.

Gimbel said, "I understand the attorneys for both sides have waived jury trial in this case of Henry Jenkins versus Russell Joseph Harley."

Both lawyers nodded. Gimbel continued, "In view of the unusual nature of this case, I imagine it will prove necessary to conduct it with a certain amount of informality. The sole purpose of this court is to arrive at the true facts at issue, and to deliver a verdict in accord with the laws pertaining to these facts. I will not stand on ceremony. Nevertheless, I will not tolerate any disturbances or unnecessary irregularities. The spectators will kindly remember that they are here on privilege. Any demonstration will result in the clearing of the court."

He looked severely at the white faces that gleamed unintelligently up at him. He suppressed a sigh as he said, "The counsel for the plaintiff will begin."

Turnbull rose quickly to his feet, faced the judge.

"Your honor," he said, "we propose to show that my client, Henry Jenkins, has been deprived of his just rights by the defendant. Mr. Jenkins, by virtue of a sustained residence of more than twenty years in the house located on Route 22, eight miles north of the town of Rebel Butte, with the full knowledge of its legal owner, has acquired certain rights. In legal terminology we define these as the rights of adverse possession. The layman would call them common-law rights—squatters' rights."

Gimbel folded his hands and tried to relax. Squatters' rights—for a ghost! He sighed, but listened attentively as Turnbull went on.

"Upon the death of Zebulon Harley, the owner of the house involved—it is better known, perhaps, as Harley Hall—the defendant inherited title to the property. We do not question his right to it. But my client has an equity in Harley Hall; the right to free and full occupation of it for the duration of his existence. The defendant has forcefully evicted my client, by means which have caused my client great mental distress, and have even endangered his very existence."

Gimbel nodded. If the case only had a precedent somewhere. . . . But it hadn't; he remembered grimly the hours he'd spent thumbing through all sorts of unlikely law books, looking for anything that might bear on the case. It had been his better judgment that he throw the case out of court outright—a judge couldn't afford to have himself laughed at, not if he were ambitious. And public laughter was about

the only certainty there was to this case. But Wilson had put up such a fight that the judge's temper had taken over. He never did like Wilson, anyhow.

"You may proceed with your witnesses," he said.

Turnbull nodded. To the clerk he said, "Call Henry Jenkins to the stand."

Wilson was on his feet before the clerk opened his mouth.

"Objection!" he bellowed. "The so-called Henry Jenkins cannot qualify as a witness!"

"Why not?" demanded Turnbull.

"Because he's dead!"

The judge clutched his gavel with one hand, forehead with the other. He banged on the desk to quiet the courtroom.

Turnbull stood there, smiling. "Naturally," he said, "you'll have proof of that statement."

Wilson snarled. "Certainly." He referred to his brief. "The so-called Henry Jenkins is the ghost, spirit or specter of one Hank Jenkins, who prospected for gold in this territory a century ago. He was killed by a bullet through the throat from the gun of one Long Tom Cooper, and was declared legally dead on September 14, 1850. Cooper was hung for his murder. No matter what hocus-pocus you produce for evidence to the contrary now, that status of legal death remains completely valid."

"What evidence have you of the identity of my client with this Hank Jenkins?" Turnbull asked grimly.

"Do you deny it?"

Turnbull shrugged. "I deny nothing. I'm not being cross-examined. Furthermore, the sole prerequisite of a witness is that he understand the value of an oath. Henry Jenkins was tested by John Quincy Fitzjames, professor of psychology at the University of Southern California. The results—I have Dr. Fitzjames' sworn statement of them here, which I will introduce as an exhibit—show clearly that my client's intelligence quotient is well above normal, and that a psychiatric examination discloses no important aberrations which would injure his validity as a witness. I insist that my client be allowed to testify on his own behalf."

"But he's dead!" squawked Wilson. "He's invisible right now!"

"My client," said Turnbull stiffly, "is not present just now. Undoubtedly that accounts for what you term his invisibility." He paused for the appreciative murmur that swept through the court. Things were breaking perfectly, he thought, smiling. "I have here another affidavit," he said. "It is signed by Elihu James and Terence MacRae, who respectively head the departments of physics and biology at the same university. It states that my client exhibits all the vital phenomena of life. I am prepared to call all three of my expert witnesses to the stand, if necessary."

Wilson scowled but said nothing. Judge Gimbel leaned forward.

"I don't see how it is possible for me to refuse the plaintiff the right to testify," he said. "If the three experts who prepared these reports will testify on the stand to the facts contained in them, Henry Jenkins may then take the stand."

Wilson sat down heavily. The three experts spoke briefly—and dryly. Wilson put them through only the most formal of cross-examinations.

THE judge declared a brief recess. In the corridor outside, Wilson and his client lit cigarettes and looked unsympathetically at each other.

"I feel like a fool," said Russell Harley. "Bringing suit against a ghost."

"The ghost brought the suit," Wilson reminded him. "If only we'd been able to hold fire for a couple more weeks, till another judge came on the bench, I could've got this thing thrown right out of court."

"Well, why couldn't we wait?"

"Because you were in such a damn hurry!" Wilson said. "You and that idiot Nicholls—so confident that it would never come to trial."

Harley shrugged, and thought unhappily of their failure in completely exorcising the ghost of Hank Jenkins. That had been

a mess. Jenkins had somehow escaped from the charmed circle they'd drawn around him, in which they'd hoped to keep him till the trial was forfeited by non-appearance.

"That's another thing," said Wilson. "Where is Nicholls?"

Harley shrugged again. "I dunno. The last I saw of him was in your office. He came around to see me right after the deputy slapped the show-cause order on me at the house. He brought me down to you—said you'd been recommended to him. Then you and him and I talked about the case for a while. He went out, after he lent me a little money to help meet your retainer. Haven't seen him since."

"I'd like to know who recommended me to him," Wilson said grimly. "I don't think he'd ever recommend anybody else. I don't like this case—and I don't much like you."

Harley growled but said nothing. He flung his cigarette away. It tasted of the garbage that hung around his neck—everything did. Nicholls had told no lies when he said Harley wouldn't much like the bundle of herbs that would ward off the ghost of old Jenkins. They smelled.

The court clerk was in the corridor, bawling something, and people were beginning to trickle back in. Harley and his attorney went with them.

When the trial had been resumed, the clerk said, "Henry Jenkins!"

Wilson was on his feet at once. He opened the door of the judge's chamber, said something in a low tone. Then he stepped back, as if to let someone through.

Pat. HISS. Pat. HISS—

There was a concerted gasp from the spectators as the weirdly appearing trickle of blood moved slowly across the open space to the witness chair. This was the ghost—the plaintiff in the most eminently absurd case in the history of jurisprudence.

"All right, Hank," Turnbull whispered. "You'll have to materialize long enough to let the clerk swear you in."

The clerk drew back nervously at the pillar of milky fog that appeared before him, vaguely humanoid in shape. A phantom hand, half transparent, reached out to touch the Bible. The clerk's voice shook as he administered the oath, and heard the response come from the heart of the cloud-pillar.

The haze drifted into the witness chair, bent curiously at about hip-height, and popped into nothingness.

The judge banged his gavel wildly. The buzz of alarm that had arisen from the spectators died out.

"I'll warn you again," he declared, "that unruliness will not be tolerated. The counsel for the plaintiff may proceed."

Turnbull walked to the witness chair and addressed its emptiness.

"Your name?"

"My name is Henry Jenkins."

"Your occupation?"

There was a slight pause. "I have none. I guess you'd say I'm retired."

"Mr. Jenkins, just what connection have you with the building referred to as Harley Hall?"

"I have occupied it for ninety years."

"During this time, did you come to know the late Zebulon Harley, owner of the Hall?"

"I knew Zeb quite well."

Turnbull nodded. "When did you make his acquaintance?" he asked.

"In the spring of 1907. Zeb had just lost his wife. After that, you see, he made Harley Hall his year-round home. He became—well, more or less of a hermit. Before that we had never met, since he was only seldom at the Hall. But we became friendly then."

"How long did this friendship last?"

"Until he died last fall. I was with him when he died. I still have a few keepsakes he left me then." There was a distinct nostalgic sigh from the witness chair, which by now was liberally spattered with muddy red liquid. The falling drops seemed to hesitate for a second, and their sizzling noise was muted as with a strong emotion.

Turnbull went on, "Your relations with him were good, then?"

"I'd call them excellent," the emptiness

replied firmly. "Every night we sat up together. When we didn't play pinochle or chess or cribbage, we just sat and talked over the news of the day. I still have the book we used to keep records of the chess and pinochle games. Zeb made the entries himself, in his own handwriting."

TURNBULL abandoned the witness for a moment. He faced the judge with a smile. "I offer in evidence," he said, "the book mentioned. Also a ring given to the plaintiff by the late Mr. Harley, and a copy of the plays of Gilbert and Sullivan. On the flyleaf of this book is inscribed, 'To Old Hank', in Harley's own hand."

He turned again to the empty, blood-leaking witness chair.

He said, "In all your years of association, did Zebulon Harley ever ask you to leave, or to pay rent?"

"Of course not. Not Zeb!"

Turnbull nodded. "Very good," he said. "Now, just one or two more questions. Will you tell in your own words what occurred, after the death of Zebulon Harley, that caused you to bring this suit?"

"Well, in January young Harley—"

"You mean Russell Joseph Harley, the defendant?"

"Yes. He arrived at Harley Hall on January fifth. I asked him to leave, which he did. On the next day he returned with another man. They placed a talisman upon the threshold of the main entrance, and soon after sealed every threshold and windowsill in the Hall with a substance which is noxious to me. These activities were accompanied by several of the most deadly spells in the Ars Magicorum. He further added an Exclusion Circle with a radius of a little over a mile, entirely surrounding the Hall."

"I see," the lawyer said. "Will you explain to the court the effects of these activities?"

"Well," the voice said thoughtfully, "it's a little hard to put in words. I can't pass the Circle without a great expenditure of energy. Even if I did I couldn't enter the building because of the talisman and the seals."

"Could you enter by air? Through a chimney, perhaps?"

"No. The Exclusion Circle is really a sphere. I'm pretty sure the effort would destroy me."

"In effect, then, you are entirely barred from the house you have occupied for ninety years, due to the wilful acts of Russell Joseph Harley, the defendant, and an unnamed accomplice of his."

"That is correct."

Turnbull beamed. "Thank you. That's all."

He turned to Wilson, whose face had been a study in dourness throughout the entire examination. "Your witness," he said.

Wilson snapped to his feet and strode to the witness chair.

He said belligerently, "You say your name is Henry Jenkins?"

"Yes."

"That is your name now, you mean to say. What was your name before?"

"Before?" There was surprise in the voice that emanated from above the trickling blood-drops. "Before when?"

Wilson scowled. "Don't pretend ignorance," he said sharply. "Before you *died*, of course."

"Objection!" Turnbull was on his feet, glaring at Wilson. "The counsel for the defense has no right to speak of some hypothetical death of my client!"

Gimbel raised a hand wearily and cut off the words that were forming on Wilson's lips. "Objection sustained," he said. "No evidence has been presented to identify the plaintiff as the prospector who was killed in 1850—or anyone else."

Wilson's mouth twisted into a sour grimace. He continued on a lower key.

"You say, Mr. Jenkins, that you occupied Harley Hall for ninety years."

"Ninety-two years next month. The Hall wasn't built—in its present form, anyhow—until 1876, but I occupied the house that stood on the site previously."

"What did you do before then?"

"Before then?" The voice paused, then said doubtfully, "I don't remember."

"You're under oath!" Wilson flared.

The voice got firmer. "Ninety years is a long time," it said. "I don't remember."

"Let's see if I can't refresh your memory. Is it true that ninety-one years ago, in the very year in which you claim to have begun your occupancy of Harley Hall, Hank Jenkins was killed in a gun duel?"

"That may be true, if you say so. I don't remember."

"Do you remember that the shooting occurred not fifty feet from the present site of Harley Hall?"

"It may be."

"Well, then," Wilson thundered, "is it not a fact that when Hank Jenkins died by violence his ghost assumed existence? That it was then doomed to haunt the site of its slaying throughout eternity?"

The voice said evenly, "I have no knowledge of that."

"Do you deny that it is well known throughout that section that the ghost of Hank Jenkins haunts Harley Hall?"

"Objection!" shouted Turnbull. "Popular opinion is not evidence."

"Objection sustained. Strike the question from the record."

Wilson, badgered, lost his control. In a dangerously uneven voice, he said, "Perjury is a criminal offense. Mr. Jenkins, do you deny that you are the ghost of Hank Jenkins?"

The tone was surprised. "Why, certainly."

"You *are* a ghost, aren't you?"

Stiffly, "I'm an entity on the astral plane."

"That, I believe, is what is called a ghost?"

"I can't help what it's called. I've heard you called a lot of things. Is that proof?"

There was a surge of laughter from the audience. Gimbel slammed his gavel down on the bench.

"The witness," he said, "will confine himself to answering questions."

Wilson bellowed, "In spite of what you say, it's true, isn't it, that you are merely the spirit of a human being who had died through violence?"

The voice from above the blood drops retorted, "I repeat that I am an entity of the astral plane. I am not aware that I was ever a human being."

The lawyer turned an exasperated face to the bench.

"Your honor," he said, "I ask that you instruct the witness to cease playing verbal hide-and-seek. It is quite evident that the witness is a ghost, and that he is therefore the relict of some human being, ipso facto. Circumstantial evidence is strong that he is the ghost of the Hank Jenkins who was killed in 1850. But this is a non-essential point. What is definite is that he is the ghost of someone who is dead, and hence is unqualified to act as witness! I demand his testimony be stricken from the record!"

TURNBULL spoke up at once. "Will the counsel for the defense quote his authority for branding my client a ghost —in the face of my client's repeated declaration that he is an entity of the astral plane? What is the legal definition of a ghost?"

Judge Gimbel smiled. "Counsel for the defense will proceed with the cross-examination," he said.

Wilson's face flushed dark purple. He mopped his brow with a large bandanna, then glared at the dropping, sizzling trickle of blood.

"Whatever you are," he said, "answer me this question. Can you pass through a wall?"

"Why, yes. Certainly." There was a definite note of surprise in the voice from nowhere. "But it isn't as easy as some people think. It definitely requires a lot of effort."

"Never mind that. You can do it?"

"Yes."

"Could you be bound by any physical means? Would handcuffs hold you? Or ropes, chains, prison walls, a hermetically sealed steel chest?"

Jenkins had no chance to answer. Turnbull, scenting danger, cut in hastily. "I object to this line of questioning. It is entirely irrelevant."

"On the contrary," Wilson cried loudly, "it bears strongly on the qualifications of

the so-called Henry Jenkins as a witness! I demand that he answer the question."

Judge Gimbel said, "Objection overruled. Witness will answer the question."

The voice from the chair said superciliously, "I don't mind answering. Physical barriers mean nothing to me, by and large."

The counsel for the defense drew himself up triumphantly.

"Very good," he said with satisfaction. "*Very* good." Then to the judge, the words coming sharp and fast, "I claim, your honor, that the so-called Henry Jenkins has no legal status as a witness in court. There is clearly no value in understanding the nature of an oath if a violation of the oath can bring no punishment in its wake. The statements of a man who can perjure himself freely have no worth. I demand they be stricken from the record!"

Turnbull was at the judge's bench in two strides.

"I had anticipated that, your honor," he said quickly. "From the very nature of the case, however, it is clear that my client can be very definitely restricted in his movements—spells, pentagrams, talismans, amulets, Exclusion Circles and what-not. I have here—which I am prepared to deliver to the bailiff of the court—a list of the various methods of confining an astral entity to a restricted area for periods ranging from a few moments to all eternity. Moreover, I have also signed a bond for five thousand dollars, prior to the beginning of the trial, which I stand ready to forfeit should my client be confined and make his escape, if found guilty of any misfeasance as a witness."

Gimbel's face, which had looked startled for a second, slowly cleared. He nodded. "The court is satisfied with the statement of the counsel for the plaintiff," he declared. "There seems no doubt that the plaintiff can be penalized for any misstatements, and the motion of the defense is denied."

Wilson looked choleric, but shrugged. "All right," he said. "That will be all."

"You may step down, Mr. Jenkins," Gimbel directed, and watched in fascination as the blood-dripping column rose and floated over the floor, along the corridor, out the door.

Turnbull approached the judge's bench again. He said, "I would like to place in evidence these notes, the diary of the late Zebulon Harley. It was presented to my client by Harley himself last fall. I call particular attention to the entry for April sixth, nineteen seventeen, in which he mentions the entrance of the United States into the First World War, and records the results of a series of eleven pinochle games played with a personage identified as 'Old Hank'. With the court's permission, I will read the entry for that day, and also various other entries for the next four years. Please note the references to someone known variously as 'Jenkins', 'Hank Jenkins' and—in one extremely significant passage—'Old Invisible'."

Wilson stewed silently during the slow reading of Harley's diary. There was anger on his face, but he paid close attention, and when the reading was over he leaped to his feet.

"I would like to know," he asked, "if the counsel for the plaintiff is in possession of any diaries *after* nineteen twenty?"

Turnbull shook his head. "Harley apparently never kept a diary, except during the four years represented in this."

"Then I demand that the court refuse to admit this diary as evidence on two counts," Wilson said. He raised two fingers to tick off the points. "In the first place, the evidence presented is frivolous. The few vague and unsatisfactory references to Jenkins nowhere specifically describe him as what he is—ghost, astral entity or what you will. Second, the evidence, even were the first point overlooked, concerns only the years up to nineteen twenty-one. The case concerns itself only with the supposed occupation of Harley Hall by the so-called Jenkins in the last twenty years—*since* 'twenty-one. Clearly, the evidence is therefore irrelevant."

Gimbel looked at Turnbull, who smiled calmly.

"The reference to 'Old Invisible' is far

from vague," he said. "It is a definite indication of the astral character of my client. Furthermore, evidence as to the friendship of my client with the late Mr. Zebulon Harley before nineteen twenty-one is entirely relevant, as such a friendship, once established, would naturally be presumed to have continued indefinitely. Unless, of course, the defense is able to present evidence to the contrary."

Judge Gimbel said, "The diary is admitted as evidence."

Turnbull said, "I rest my case."

There was a buzz of conversation in the courtroom while the judge looked over the diary, and then handed it to the clerk to be marked and entered.

Gimbel said, "The defense may open its case."

Wilson rose. To the clerk he said, "Russell Joseph Harley."

But young Harley was recalcitrant. "Nix," he said, on his feet, pointing at the witness chair. "That thing's got blood all over it! You don't expect me to sit down in that large puddle of blood, do you?"

Judge Gimbel leaned over to look at the chair. The drip-drop trickle of blood from the apparition who'd been testifying had left its mark. Muddy brown all down the front of the chair. Gimbel found himself wondering how the ghost managed to replenish its supply of the fluid, but gave it up.

"I see your point," he said. "Well, it's getting a bit late anyhow. The clerk will take away the present witness chair and replace it. In the interim, I declare the court recessed till tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

III

RUSSELL HARLEY noticed how the elevator boy's back registered repulsion and disapproval, and scowled. He was not a popular guest in the hotel, he knew well. Where he made his mistake, though, was in thinking that the noxious bundle of herbs about his neck was the cause of it. His odious personality had a lot to do with the chilly attitude of the management and his fellow guests.

He made his way to the bar, ignoring the heads that turned in surprise to follow the reeking comet-tail of his passage. He entered the red-leather-and-chromium drinking room, and stared about for Lawyer Wilson.

And blinked in surprise when he saw him. Wilson wasn't alone. In the booth with him was a tall, dark figure, with his back to Harley. The back alone was plenty for recognition. Nicholls!

Wilson had seen him. "Hello, Harley," he said, all smiles and affability in the presence of the man with the money. "Come on and sit down. Mr. Nicholls dropped in on me a little while ago, so I brought him over."

"Hello," Harley said glumly, and Nicholls nodded. The muscles of his cheeks pulsed, and he seemed under a strain, strangely uncomfortable in Harley's presence. Still there was a twinkle in the look he gave young Harley, and his voice was friendly enough—though supercilious—as he said:

"Hello, Harley. How is the trial going?"

"Ask him," said Harley, pointing a thumb at Wilson as he slid his knees under the booth's table and sat down. "He's the lawyer. He's supposed to know these things."

"Doesn't he?"

Harley shrugged and craned his neck for the waitress. "Oh, I guess so. . . . Rye and water!" He watched the girl appreciatively as she nodded and went off to the bar, then turned his attention back to Nicholls. "The trouble is," he said, "Wilson may think he knows, but I think he's all wet."

Wilson frowned. "Do you imply—" he began, but Nicholls put up a hand.

"Let's not bicker," said Nicholls. "Suppose you answer my question. I have a stake in this, and I want to know. How's the trial going?"

Wilson put on his most open-faced expression. "Frankly," he said, "not too well. I'm afraid the judge is on the other

side. If you'd listened to me and stalled till another judge came along—"

"I had no time to stall," said Nicholls. "I have to be elsewhere within a few days. Even now, I should be on my way. Do you think we might lose the case?"

Harley laughed sharply. As Wilson glared at him he took his drink from the waitress' tray and swallowed it. The smile remained on his face as he listened to Wilson say smoothly:

"There is a good deal of danger, yes."

"Hum." Nicholls looked interestedly at his fingernails. "Perhaps I chose the wrong lawyer."

"Sure you did." Harley waved at the waitress, ordered another drink. "You want to know what else I think? I think you picked the wrong client, spelled s-t-o-o-g-e. I'm getting sick of this. This damn thing around my neck smells bad. How do I know it's any good, anyhow? Far as I can see, it just smells bad, and that's all."

"It works," Nicholls said succinctly. "I wouldn't advise you to go without it. The late Hank Jenkins is not a very strong ghost—a strong one would tear you apart and chew up your herbs for dessert—but without the protection of what you wear about your neck, you would become a very uncomfortable human as soon as Jenkins heard you'd stopped wearing it."

He put down the glass of red wine he'd been inhaling without drinking, looked intently at Wilson. "I've put up the money in this," he said. "I had hoped you'd be able to handle the legal end. I see I'll have to do more. Now listen intently, because I have no intention of repeating this. There's an angle to this case that's got right by your blunted legal acumen. Jenkins claims to be an astral entity, which he undoubtedly is. Now, instead of trying to prove him a ghost, and legally dead, and therefore unfit to testify, which you have been doing, suppose you do this. . . ."

He went on to speak rapidly and to the point.

And when he left them a bit later, and

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Wilson took Harley up to his room and poured him into bed, the lawyer felt happy for the first time in days.

RUSSELL JOSEPH HARLEY, a little hung over and a lot nervous, was called to the stand as first witness in his own behalf.

Wilson said, "Your name?"

"Russell Joseph Harley."

"You are the nephew of the late Zebulon Harley, who bequeathed the residence known as Harley Hall to you?"

"Yes."

Wilson turned to the bench. "I offer this copy of the late Mr. Zebulon Harley's will in evidence. All his possessions are left to his nephew and only living kin, the defendant."

Turnbull spoke from his desk. "The plaintiff in no way disputes the defendant's equity in Harley Hall."

Wilson continued, "You passed part of your childhood in Harley Hall, did you not, and visited it as a grown man on occasion?"

"Yes."

"At any time, has anything in the shape of a ghost, specter or astral entity manifested itself to you in Harley Hall?"

"No. I'd remember it."

"Did your late uncle ever mention any such manifestation to you?"

"Him? No."

"That's all."

Turnbull came up for the cross-examination.

"When, Mr. Harley, did you last see your uncle before his death?"

"It was in nineteen thirty-eight. In September, some time—around the tenth or eleventh of the month."

"How long a time did you spend with him?"

Harley flushed unaccountably. "Ah—just one day," he said.

"When before that did you see him?"

"Well, not since I was quite young. My parents moved to Pennsylvania in nineteen twenty."

"And since then—except for that one-day visit in nineteen thirty-eight—has any communication passed between your uncle and yourself?"

"No, I guess not. He was a rather queer duck—solitary. A little bit balmy, I think."

"Well, you're a loving nephew. But in view of what you've just said, does it sound surprising that your uncle never told you of Mr. Jenkins? He never had much chance to, did he?"

"He had a chance in nineteen thirty-eight, but he didn't," Harley said defiantly.

Turnbull shrugged. "I'm finished," he said.

Gimbel began to look bored. He had anticipated something more in the way of fireworks. He said, "Has the defense any further witnesses?"

Wilson smiled grimly. "Yes, your honor," he said. This was his big moment, and he smiled again as he said gently, "I would like to call Mr. Henry Jenkins to the stand."

IN THE amazed silence that followed, Judge Gimbel leaned forward. "You mean you wish to call the plaintiff as a witness for the defense?"

Serenely, "Yes, your honor."

Gimbel grimaced. "Call Henry Jenkins," he said wearily to the clerk, and sank back in his chair.

Turnbull was looking alarmed. He bit his lip, trying to decide whether to object to this astonishing procedure, but finally shrugged as the clerk bawled out the ghost's name.

Turnbull sped down the corridor, out the door. His voice was heard in the anteroom, then he returned more slowly. Behind him came the trickle of blood drops: *Pat. HISS. Pat. HISS*—

"One moment," said Gimbel, coming to life again. "I have no objection to your testifying, Mr. Jenkins, but the State should not be subjected to the needless expense of reupholstering its witness chair every time you do. Bailiff, find some sort of a rug or something to throw over the chair before Mr. Jenkins is sworn in."

A tarpaulin was hurriedly procured and

adjusted to the chair; Jenkins materialized long enough to be sworn in, then sat.

Wilson began in an amiable enough tone.

"Tell me, Mr. Jenkins," he said, "just how many 'astral entities'—I believe that is what you call yourself—are there?"

"I have no way of knowing. Many billions."

"As many, in other words, as there have been human beings to die by violence?"

Turnbull rose to his feet in sudden agitation, but the ghost neatly evaded the trap. "I don't know. I only know there are billions."

The lawyer's cat-who-ate-canary smile remained undimmed. "And all these billions are constantly about us, everywhere, only remaining invisible. Is that it?"

"Oh, no. Very few remain on Earth. Of those, still fewer have anything to do with humans. Most humans are quite boring to us."

"Well, how many would you say are on Earth? A hundred thousand?"

"Even more, maybe. But that's a good guess."

Turnbull interrupted suddenly. "I would like to know the significance of these questions. I object to this whole line of questioning as being totally irrelevant."

Wilson was a study in legal dignity. He retorted, "I am trying to elicit some facts of major value, your honor. This may change the entire character of the case. I ask your patience for a moment or two."

"Counsel for the defense may continue," Gimbel said curtly.

Wilson showed his canines in a grin. He continued to the blood-dripping before him. "Now, the contention of your counsel is that the late Mr. Harley allowed an 'astral entity' to occupy his home for twenty years or more, with his full knowledge and consent. That strikes me as being entirely improbable, but shall we for the moment assume it to be the case?"

"Certainly! It's the truth."

"Then tell me, Mr. Jenkins, have you fingers?"

"Have I—what?"

"You heard me!" Wilson snapped. "Have you fingers, flesh-and-blood fingers, capable of making an imprint?"

"Why, no. I—"

Wilson rushed on. "Or have you a photograph of yourself—or specimens of your handwriting—or any sort of material identification? Have you any of these?"

The voice was definitely querulous. "What do you mean?"

Wilson's voice became harsh, menacing. "I mean, can you prove that *you* are the astral entity alleged to have occupied Zebulon Harley's home. Was it you—or was it another of the featureless, faceless, intangible unknowns—one of the hundreds of thousands of them that, by your own admission, are all over the face of the earth, rambling where they choose, not halted by any locks or bars? Can you prove that *you* are anyone in particular?"

"Your honor!" Turnbull's voice was almost a shriek as he found his feet at last. "My client's identity was never in question!"

"It is now!" roared Wilson. "The opposing counsel has presented a personage whom he styles 'Henry Jenkins'. Who is this Jenkins? What is he? Is he even an individual—or a corporate aggregation of these mysterious 'astral entities' which we are to believe are everywhere, but which we never see? If he is an individual, is he *the* individual? And how can we know that even if he says he is? Let him produce evidence—photographs, a birth certificate, fingerprints. Let him bring in identifying witnesses who have known both ghosts, and are prepared to swear that these ghosts are the same ghost. Failing this, there is no case! Your honor, I demand the court declare an immediate judgment in favor of the defendant!"

Judge Gimbel stared at Turnbull. "Have you anything to say?" he asked. "The argument of the defense would seem to have every merit with it. Unless you can produce some sort of evidence as to the identity of your client, I have no alternative but to find for the defense."

For a moment there was a silent tableau. Wilson triumphant, Turnbull furiously frustrated.

How could you identify a ghost?

And then came the quietly amused voice from the witness chair.

"This thing has gone far enough," it said above the sizzle and splatter of its own leaking blood. "I believe I can present proof that will satisfy the court."

Wilson's face fell with express-elevator speed. Turnbull held his breath, afraid to hope.

Judge Gimbel said, "You are under oath. Proceed."

There was no other sound in the courtroom as the voice said, "Mr. Harley, here, spoke of a visit to his uncle in nineteen thirty-eight. I can vouch for that. They spent a night and a day together. They weren't alone. I was there."

No one was watching Russell Harley, or they might have seen the sudden sick pallor that passed over his face.

The voice, relentless, went on. "Perhaps I shouldn't have eavesdropped as I did, but old Zeb never had any secrets from me anyhow. I listened to what they talked about. Young Harley was working for a bank in Philadelphia at the time. His first big job. He needed money, and needed it bad. There was a shortage in his department. A woman named Sally—"

"Hold on!" Wilson yelled. "This has nothing to do with your identification of yourself. Keep to the point!"

But Turnbull had begun to comprehend. He was shouting too, almost too excited to be coherent. "Your honor, my client must be allowed to speak. If he shows knowledge of an intimate conversation between the late Mr. Harley and the defendant, it would be certain proof that he enjoyed the late Mr. Harley's confidence, and thus, Q.E.D., that he is no other than the astral entity who occupied Harley Hall for so long!"

Gimbel nodded sharply. "Let me remind counsel for the defense that this is his own witness. Mr. Jenkins, continue."

THE voice began again, "As I was saying, the woman's name—"

"Shut up, damn you!" Harley yelled. He sprang upright, turned beseechingly toward the judge. "He's twisting it! Make him stop! Sure, I knew my uncle had a ghost. He's it, all right, curse his black soul! He can have the house if he wants it—I'll clear out. I'll clear out of the whole damned state!"

He broke off into babbling and turned about wildly. Only the intervention of a marshal kept him from hurtling out of the courtroom.

Banging of the gavel and hard work by the court clerk and his staff restored order in the courtroom. When the room had returned almost to normalcy, Judge Gimbel, perspiring and annoyed, said. "As far as I am concerned, identification of the witness is complete. Has the defense any further evidence to present?"

Wilson shrugged morosely. "No, your honor."

"Counsel for the plaintiff?"

"Nothing, your honor. I rest my case."

Gimbel plowed a hand through his sparse hair and blinked. "In that case," he said, "I find for the plaintiff. An order is entered hereby that the defendant, Russell Joseph Harley, shall remove from the premises of Harley Hall all spells, pentagrams, talismans and other means of exorcism employed; that he shall cease and desist from making any attempts, of whatever nature, to evict the tenant in the future; and that Henry Jenkins, the plaintiff, shall be permitted the full use and occupancy of the premises designated as Harley Hall for the full term of his natural—ah—existence."

The gavel banged. "The case is closed."

"DON'T take it so hard," said a mild voice behind Russell Harley. He whirled surlily. Nicholls was coming up the street after him from the courthouse, Wilson in tow.

Nicholls said, "You lost the case, but you've still got your life. Let me buy you a drink. In here, perhaps."

He herded them into a cocktail lounge, sat them down before they had a chance to object. He glanced at his expensive wrist watch. "I have a few minutes," he said. "Then I really must be off. It's urgent."

He hailed a barman, ordered for all. Then he looked at young Harley and smiled broadly as he dropped a bill on the counter to pay for the drinks.

"Harley," he said, "I have a motto that you would do well to remember at times like these. I'll make you a present of it, if you like."

"What is it?"

" 'The worst is yet to come.' "

Harley snarled and swallowed his drink without replying. Wilson said, "What gets me is, why didn't they come to us before the trial with that stuff about this charmingly illicit client you wished on me? We'd have had to settle out of court."

Nicholls shrugged. "They had their reasons," he said. "After all one case of exorcism, more or less, doesn't matter. But lawsuits set precedents. You're a lawyer, of sorts, Wilson; do you see what I mean?"

"Precedents?" Wilson looked at him slackjawed for a moment; then his eyes widened.

"I see you understand me." Nicholls nodded. "From now on in this state—and by virtue of the full-faith-and-credence clause of the Constitution, in *every* state of the country—a ghost has a legal right to haunt a house!"

"Good lord!" said Wilson. He began to laugh, not loud, but from the bottom of his chest.

Harley stared at Nicholls. "Once and for all," he whispered, "tell me—what's your angle on all this?"

Nicholls smiled again.

"Think about it a while," he said lightly. "You'll begin to understand." He sniffed his wine once more, then sat the glass down gently—

And vanished.

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The Pineys

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

". . . I may not believe in them, but I am afraid of them."

AT THOSE words the three men in front of the country filling station fell quickly silent. Whether they were amused or shocked, I, for one, couldn't tell. I just leaned back in the rear seat of Mr. Beau Sawtelle's sedan, where nobody could see me. Mr. Beau Sawtelle drummed his fat knuckles on the steering wheel. He looked at his blonde niece Terry, then over his heavy shoulder at me, and finally at the tallest and oldest of the men. Mr. Beau was thick and glumly alert, like a toad; like the car-driving toad in that Wind in the Willows story. For some reason Terry herself had mentioned the story and told a piece of it, right after they'd seen me up the highway with my thumb stuck out, and stopped to give me a lift. Not that Mr. Beau Saw-

Heading by Vincent Napoli

tetlle seemed the type to stop for a strange hitch-hiker, but maybe he couldn't help stopping for me.

"You sure you want to head for Piney's Grove, mister?" asked the tallest and oldest man.

"Piney's Grove, yes," repeated Mr. Beau gruffly. "Where the Pineys are supposed to live."

"Oh," said the tallest and oldest man. "You've heard about them."

"A little," said Mr. Beau, his toad-profile turned to me, "but not yet have I heard how I get there. If you please, friend."

The tallest and oldest man hooked his gaunt thumbs in the belt of his blue jeans and drummed his fingers on his hip bones. He squinted behind his glasses, and spit over one shoulder. "I myself never been down there. When I was just a chap, old folks used to tell tales about the place to keep us away from there."

"To make you stay away they must have told you where Piney's Grove was," said Mr. Beau.

"That's right, sir." The tallest and oldest man took one thumb out of his belt and pointed it down the road. "You have to go three-four miles. You curve around a quick bend, and you're not across Drowning Creek yet, but you see a sort of winding road going through the trees to your right. Them trees is thick and green a right much. From what I used to be told, you follow that road in to its end, and when you're at the end of it, why, you're at Piney's Grove."

"Thank you, friend," said Mr. Beau. "When we're settled in, you all come and visit us, hear?"

Another batch of silence, and it still hung over the men at the filling station as Mr. Beau shifted gears, started the car and drove us away.

We ourselves didn't speak for a while. Mr. Beau hunched his slack, heavy shoulders over his wheel. Terry fluffed back her cloud of hair, that was like pale yellow leaves of autumn with the sun on them. I half lay in the rear seat, an elbow on my pack. Finally Mr. Beau turned just enough so that his words blew back to me.

"Mac?" I'd told them they might call me Mac. "We're just about due to leave the highway. Where would you like us to let you off?"

"Nowhere in particular," I replied. "I'm going nowhere." And that was as close to true as anything I'd told him and Terry since they picked me up.

"Just drifting?" he asked.

"Right now, I'm wondering if I mightn't ride on and see you come to this Piney's Grove; the place those men were so funny about."

Mr. Beau made a *grump* sound, the way a toad might try to chuckle. "If you really don't have a home or job, might you like to work for me a couple of days, Mac? You seem a nice young fellow, I like you and think I can trust you around."

Terry's shoulders tightened a bit, as if the suggestion worried her. She didn't turn her smooth, pretty face back to me, but I guessed it was frowning a little. "I'd be proud, Mr. Beau," I said. "Proud to help you."

"Then okay," he said.

WE DROVE along and found that quick bend we'd been told about. And just beyond, along the side of the highway, plodded toward us a straight, shabby old Negro. Mr. Beau put on the brakes and rolled to a stop and waited for the man to come up to us. He was a good-looking old brown-black fellow. He took off his shabby straw hat, the way mannerly Negroes do in North Carolina. "Good evenin', lady and gentlemans," he said gently. "How you today?"

"Uncle," said Mr. Beau, "you know how to direct us to Piney's Grove?"

The Negro's face turned blank, the way those faces at the filling station had turned. The dark lids hooded the eyes a little. Then a finger like a black billy club pointed. "That trail right there yonder, sir. You ain't fixin' to go there, is you?"

"Why not, Uncle?" asked Mr. Beau.

White-rimmed eyes were eloquent in the thunder-dark face. "Pineys might not like it, sir."

"You believe in the Pineys?" asked Terry, leaning across Mr. Beau.

The eyes hooded themselves again, courteously timid. "Most folks believes in the

Pineys, Miss. Even them that says don't believe, them scared."

Terry chuckled, not sounding shaky. "The Pineys must be horrible people."

"They horrible, all right," agreed the old Negro, as grave as a Chinese philosopher, "but they ain't peoples."

"Maybe they won't know we're coming," suggested Terry.

"They bound to know. They got a king, he out figurin' on you all, know you all's comin' to Piney's Grove."

"King, eh?" said Terry. "I never heard that."

"Thanks, Uncle," said Mr. Beau. He started the car again and drove to where the trail mouthed onto the highway as a creek onto a river. He turned us in and we went along. Glancing back, I saw the Negro gazing after us, like a dark statue.

Almost at once the trees made a tunnel, lacing their branches above us from side to side and shutting out the bright sun of late afternoon.

Often I've thought of the South as a place of extreme, almost frightening, contrasts. You travel along and come to a place like the one I'm telling about, where the light is shut out so you're almost benighted, and suddenly you'll whip out among the shadowing trees into a field of cotton, dazzling, blinding white. Only that wasn't what happened this time. We kept on under the tunnel of branches, while the trees clouded in closer and closer, and the track grew narrower, until it was barely wide enough for the car to pass. Under the tires lay thick, thick layers of brown pine straw, the droppings of seasons, and they muffled the noise of our travel.

Mr. Beau was remembering how the old man at the filling station had directed him to come to the end of the road and find Piney's Grove. This wasn't a road we travelled, but it came to an end. Mr. Beau stopped the car and got out. So did Terry. So did I. I flung my pack under one of the tall, straight longleaf pines that rose like pillars in a big church or auditorium or warehouse, and mixed their tufts of span-long needles overhead into a gloomy roof. Every pine trunk slanted a little southward, from having stood so long against the north winds of mild Carolina winters. Underfoot lay the fallen pine straw, thick and soft and even as an expensive brown carpet. All around us grew the pines, out to where suddenly the grove was walled in by thick growth of brush and thorny creepers. It was like walking into a banquet hall after the crowd had gone. The poet Tom Moore, Terry told me she remembered, had written something like that in the last lines of a poem called Oft in the Stilly Night.

"Know why Piney's Grove is like this?" Mr. Beau asked Terry. "It's never been cultivated. Nobody ever held title to it. In the old days, when there were houses hereabouts, the colonists brought certain beliefs from Europe with them. A community used to set aside a tract and call it Devil's Croft —that's what you see here. It was supposed to belong to evil spirits, who'd stay there and leave the rest of the ground alone."

Terry shifted her feet on the carpet of needles, as if she wished she was somewhere else.

"Here we are," said Mr. Beau, "and here we stay." He looked up along one tall trunk, and along another. "What magnificent trees! As fine as I've ever seen." Then he gazed along the muffled ground. "Clean and level as a floor. No dead wood. It reminds me of what someone told me about an African jungle, where the white ants, the termites, had eaten up all the fallen dead branches and left things spick and span." He faced me. "Mac, you said you've been around here."

"In my time, yes," I said.

"Do you suppose termites—"

"No, sir, I doubt that the termites cleaned up this place," I said respectfully.

"Maybe the gnomes or the dwarfs did," offered Terry, smiling. Her smile was slight, but it managed to be radiant whenever she showed it.

"Or the Pineys," said Mr. Beau. "Since this was Devil's Croft, and they're devils of some sort, it was their responsibility to clean it up. Anyway, we camp here. This is the ideal spot." He tossed some bundles out of the luggage rack on top of the car. "Terry," he said, "drive back there to the crossroads and buy us some groceries."

Rapidly he scribbled out a list for her

and handed her some money. She slid under the wheel, started the car again, and backed and filled carefully around until she could head back the way we'd come. Mr. Beau unrolled a canvas pup tent and another, and I helped him pitch them side by side under the tall pines. He was active, for all his heavy body and short, crooked legs. "These trees are perfect for my purpose," he kept saying, as if I'd argued otherwise.

I knew what his purpose was. He was a government tree specialist, and hard at work on the problem of longleaf pine cultivation. The government sponsored it, big lumber companies approved it. You can't always get longleaf pine to grow where it isn't native, and it would mean plenty of lumber and money if it could be cultivated generally. Mr. Beau Sawtelle was going to camp here, in this specially informative spot, and pry into the longleaf business with the eye of a botanist and economist.

After the tents were up, he scuffed through the carpet of needles and scooped earth into a pan, for tests with his portable laboratory equipment. "Hope it stays clear tomorrow," he said, gazing upward. "Isn't it getting cloudy?"

"I think we're just pretty much in the shade," I told him.

"Help me gather wood, Mac," he directed. We had to go quite a way for some, because of that swept-floor aspect of Piney's Grove, but in among the brushy wall thickets we got two big man-loads and brought it back. Then Terry drove into sight. She'd fetched some paper bags full of food, and she'd fetched a pale, drawn face, too.

"Those men at the crossroads," she said. "They seem to be betting on whether we'll last out the night here."

She stared, I listened. And Mr. Beau gave his croaking toad-chuckle.

"Mac," he called to me, "why don't you run back up there and take some of that money they want to bet."

"No, thank you kindly," I said, "I'll just stay here."

"If I wasn't so busy with trees," Mr. Beau went on, "I'd make a study of country superstitions. Like the way Carolina folks plant by the full moon, and won't sit down thirteen at a time, and believe in those devouring Pineys! I'm surprised they know enough to lie down when they're tired."

"Well, I'm tired," said Terry, "and a little nervous. I know enough to relax." She sat down with her back against a pine trunk.

"You'll feel better when you've had some supper," smiled Mr. Beau. He bustled with a frying pan and a coffee pot while I built up the fire. It seemed cheerful as the gloom gathered. We made a good-humored meal together, and sat around the fire afterward. Terry smoked a cigarette, and Mr. Beau did the talking.

He told us all about pine trees. They're old, old inhabitants, said Mr. Beau. Back as far as Silurian times, he said, a good few million years, there were pines growing among the giant horsetails and tree ferns, with big crawfish and worms wriggling around their roots, getting ready to turn into fish or snakes.

"Were there any Pineys then?" asked

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Terry. She was still worrying over those bets among the men at the crossroads station.

Mr. Beau shook his head. "I haven't bothered with that Piney superstition, except to laugh at it. In any case, most of the Piney tales—about young lovers wandering among the pines and never coming back, things like that—don't come from around here. This Piney's Grove legend is told around here, but no catastrophes tied to it."

"Because people stayed away from Piney's Grove, perhaps," I suggested.

"Up to now," added Terry. "Mac, do you know about the Pineys?"

"A few things," I replied, and she gave me that strange, confused look of somebody who doesn't want to listen, but does.

"Folks will tell you," I continued, "that the Pineys live around the longleaf districts, and have lived there since the beginning of time—maybe all the way back to the Silurian age Mr. Beau mentioned. The pines are their home land, and they don't like pines to be destroyed or meddled with. They're shy and timid, except when they're on fighting terms."

"What did that old colored man say about their not being people?" reminded Terry.

"There's argument about whether they are or not. The earliest Indians used to say that the Pineys came before the Indians, and that the Pineys learned from the Indians to imitate the looks and ways of men. They're supposed to be rather smallish—say five feet tall, and slender—and they stand up on short legs and their arms are long and knobby. Some folks claim they wear clothes made of pine straw, some say their bodies are just shaggy, like a dog's. They have long heads with sharp faces, like a possum. And their hands have funny fingers. The third finger—what you call the ring finger—is longer than the middle one."

"Longer than the middle finger!" cried out Mr. Beau. "That's like the old Shonokin myths, about a race that wasn't human but had magic power and ruled America before the Indians."

"I've heard tell that the Indian word Shonokin means pine man," I said.

MR. BEAU had dug sand out from under the needles, and was using it to scrub out the frying pan. "This opens up an interesting speculation," he chattered. "You know that scientists think the old European legends about ogres and trolls date back to when the first real men, *homo sapiens,* met the coarse, hairy prehumans, *homo Neanderthalensis,* in western Europe during the Rough Stone Age. Prehuman remains might still turn up in America. Do you think maybe those stories about Shonokins and Pineys might indicate that there was some sort of Neanderthaler race in Stone-Age America?"

"I'm no scholar, I can't say," I said. "I'm just telling you the old tales. The Pineys aren't a dead race. They're still here—especially in the longleaf country, hiding nobody knows where. And folks say they're organized. They have a king."

"That colored man mentioned the king of the Pineys," said Terry, and she shuddered again. "He must be the worst of the lot."

I smiled to calm her. "On the contrary, he's supposed to be bigger than any of his subjects. Able to disguise himself by magic or something, so he can pass for a human being. And he goes out into the world to spot dangers to the Pineys, and to the pines where they live."

"You make them sound afraid of men," said Mr. Beau.

"I guess they are," I replied. "They're afraid of men, just the way rats are."

"Rats will fight if you corner them," said Terry. Her hand trembled as she lighted another cigarette. "And, look; long ago, the first settlers set aside this Piney's Grove for the Pineys."

"For the evil spirits," corrected Mr. Beau.

"Well, suppose the Pineys were satisfied as long as they had this little undisturbed hideaway," she argued. "And suppose, now that we've come here, right into their last stronghold—"

She did not finish.

Mr. Beau laughed, to hearten her as I thought. "You'll have nightmares if you don't cheer up. And it's bedtime. Terry and I have our pup tents, Mac, would you like to sleep in the car?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I'll just sleep outside. It's a fine night."

"Mac isn't afraid of the Pineys," said Mr. Beau to Terry. "He doesn't believe in them."

"Remember what the old colored man said," Terry half muttered. "I'm like that. I may not believe in them, but I'm afraid of them."

"I believe in them," I announced, and both Mr. Beau and Terry stared at me.

"Then why do you hang around?" asked Mr. Beau.

"Because I'm not afraid of them," I replied, and shoved more wood into the fire. It was dark, and seemed chilly for that time of year in North Carolina. Or maybe Terry's constant shivering made it seem chilly.

"Well," said Mr. Beau, "I'm going to turn in and sleep without any nightmares. Tomorrow I'll cut some pine specimens for study."

He got down uncouthly on all fours and crawled into his tent. Terry and I sat by the fire. After a few minutes, we could hear Mr. Beau snoring.

Terry rose and reached into the purse she wore slung on a strap over her shoulder. She got out an old envelope, full of something and doubled over. Opening it, she reached in. She moved away from the fire and past the tents. She began to circle our camp slowly, dipping into the envelope and strewing something, the way a sower drops a line of seeds.

"What are you up to?" I asked.

She stood still. "In this envelope," she said, "is a mixture of herbs and dust. There's the powder of John the Conqueror Root, and some aconite, and some ashes from burned papers with spells written on them."

"Sounds like a magic formula," I commented.

She went on pacing and strewing. She angled far out to get the car inside the circle she traced. Then she came back, and sat down, looking at me. She breathed deeply, as if she was somewhat relieved.

"It is a magic formula," she told me, with an air of confessing something. "There was an old woman I used to know, who heard we were coming here and what for. She gave me that package of stuff, and told me to make a circle with it, the way you saw me do. Said it would make a charmed line that evil spirits couldn't cross. I took it just to please her, but tonight—" She broke off, and smiled rather ashamedly. "Well, after all the talk, I thought it wouldn't do any harm, anyway."

"It reminds me of what I've heard about the West," I replied. "Campers sleep in the rattlesnake country and lay a horsehair rope around them. The belief is, a rattlesnake won't crawl across it."

"I don't want any snake stories on top of Piney stories," said Terry.

"However," I added, "I remember seeing a photograph of a rattler crawling across a horsehair rope."

"Hush, Mac!" she begged, and I hushed. Terry sat against the trunk of a pine near her pup tent and drew her feet up under her skirt. I sat opposite her, against another trunk. She broke the silence at last.

"Maybe I was foolish to do what I did, Mac. I feel as if something is sneaking up on us, outside that circle. A whole lot of somethings, forming a ring."

"If they're outside your magic line, why bother?" I said. "You're camping in a strange place, and you're jumpy about the Piney stories."

"You say you believe in the Pineys," she remembered. "How can you believe in them? How can you explain them scientifically?"

"I'm no scientist, and science doesn't accept Pineys anyway," I replied. "So science doesn't try to explain them."

"But a race of creatures, dating back to before the Indians, like a race of gnomes or satyrs!" She sounded half-hysterical and lifter her shoulders almost to her ears to fight a shudder out of them.

"Take care you don't wake Mr. Beau," I cautioned her.

"Why doesn't anyone see the Pineys?"

"Probably they hide, unless they want to be seen. The army held maneuvers in these parts last spring, and not a single soldier reported seeing anything like a Piney."

"Do they live underground, Mac?"

"Maybe," I said.

"Or do they slip inside hollow trees, like dryads?"

"Maybe."

"Or just vanish into thin air when they want to? I know, Mac—you're about to say maybe. I wish I could get out of the notion that they're unvanishing themselves all around us."

"Why?" I asked. "Do you see anything that looks like a Piney?"

SHE shook her fair head vigorously. "No. I just—feel them near. A sense of hate and menace. But why should Pineys be hostile to us, supposing there were Pineys? We're not here to cut their trees, we're here to study longleaf pines and see how to make more of them grow."

"That's it," I said. "Grow more pines for the sake of the lumbering interests. The Pineys don't want that. If you grew a million more pines, but cut one, it would hurt the Pineys as though you cut their flesh. That's why they resent the plan."

She looked all around. "My reason says there can't be Pineys, but my blood keeps running cold. If I believed in them, like you, I might be less jumpy."

"Perhaps," I agreed.

"You think the Pineys know what we're up to here? Oh, yes, there's that king of the Pineys. He goes out among human beings, disguises himself as one of them and spies out what's happening. I could pick out a logical suspect for king of the Pineys, Mac."

"Now you're beginning to believe in them."

"Oh, it gets easy to believe in creepy stories, here in Piney's Grove at night. Maybe tomorrow I'll laugh at all this, but right now I've been figuring on who might be their king."

"Me, perhaps?" And I smiled.

Again she shook her head. "No, you're too normal." She leaned forward and whispered. "Uncle Beau."

I glanced toward his tent. I could hear him snoring.

"If that's your theory, you'd be pleading guilty to relationship—to Piney blood," I half-teased her.

"I'm not his real niece, Mac. I only call him Uncle Beau. You see, I've worked with him so long, and I don't have any relatives of my own. But—suppose there were Pineys, and they had a king who went out in disguise. Well, just take a look at Uncle Beau. His grotesque froggy look, his strange ways, his insistence that the Pineys are only a ghost story."

"Doesn't he have an anti-Piney job?" I objected.

"That might be part of it. Maybe the king of the Pineys would get just the kind of job Uncle Beau has. He'd be a pine tree expert, so as to be next to all the plans of humanity as regarded pine trees. And he might plan to make a horrible example of his young girl assistant—yes, and a decent-seeming young hitch-hiker—by luring them into a trap."

Again she shuddered.

"How do you figure the Pineys destroy human beings that crowd them too close?" I inquired.

"I can only theorize. I imagine they strangle or smother them, and drag them off to some hidden den—maybe into some fourth dimension. What do they do with human victims?"

I smiled again, and shook my head. "Can't tell you. All people say is that the victims of the Pineys disappear and never show themselves again. But I'm interested in this notion of yours about Mr. Beau. Would it be worth his while, as king of the Pineys, to go to all that trouble getting his expert job, and then trap only two ordinary folks like you and me?"

"You see, he'd vanish, too," said Terry. "Go back to his Piney kingdom. The big pine tree expert would be mysteriously gone, and nobody—not even his girl assistant—would be left to take over in his place or report his findings. It would take some time for another expert to be trained. And it might be the Piney king again, in another disguise instead of the froggy form of Uncle Beau. Don't you agree that there's a lot of logic in the idea?"

"Yes," I conceded, "quite a lot."

Her smile was less nervous. "I'm feeling better. It's because I've been talking myself out, Mac. You're a big comfort, sitting there so calm and cheerful. I'm almost ready to crawl into my tent and go to sleep."

"I wouldn't just now, Miss Terry," I said.

HER eyes widened and she leaned forward into the firelight. "Stop that, Mac. Now you've got me imagining things again. I can almost see forms out there in the dark—shaggy forms, closing in—"

"You almost see them?" I interrupted. "Do you mean that?"

"I do see them!" she cried. "Stop scaring me. You've got me seeing things."

"But I see them, too," I said.

They were within the fringe of firelight.

A great uneven loop of them, knobby shoulder to knobby shoulder—a head shorter than the average man, standing up on scrawny, crooked legs, their bodies shaggy with what might be thick, coarse hair or a jacket of pine straw. And low skulls, sharp pointed brown ears, jutting possum noses, glowing eyes like tiny bits of coal.

The Pineys stood all around us.

Terry jumped up, glancing all around. "They've stopped closing in," she said, in a tight whisper. "The magic dust works. Look, Mac, they've come as close as they can without stepping over the circle. We're safe—"

I got up, too. "Safe from the ones outside," I corrected her.

The carpet of needles churned and heaved. Forms broke out of it, as if rising from under bed clothes. There was a Piney on each side of Terry inside the circle. Anothed slid out of the tree she'd been sitting against, and still another fell almost on top of him.

Terry screamed, shrill and ear-splitting as a steam whistle. Mr. Beau woke up with a snort and a roar, and came floundering out of his tent. That same moment the nearest Pineys had him, the way big shaggy ants might pile on top of a beetle. They had him silenced and helpless while you could count three.

And others were rising out of the needles, dropping out of the trees, filling the space around the fire inside the circle of dust Terry had strewn.

Terry ran toward me, the only protection she could hope for. I stood where I had risen, and flung both my hands high above my head.

"Stand still, all of you!" I shouted at the top of my voice. "Not one of you moves until I lower my hands!"

They froze where they were—the throng of them around us, the pile of them on top of Mr. Beau, the shoulder-to-shoulder ring of them outside the circle. Their noses pointed at me, their eyes glowed at me.

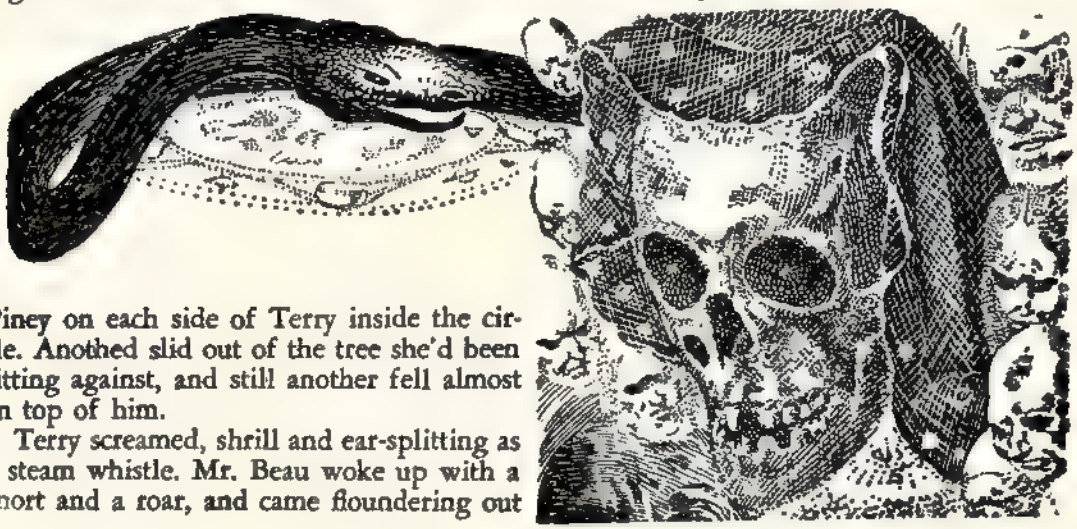
Terry caught me by the sleeve.

"Mac," she breathed, "you can save us from them. I know you can. You're stronger than all of them put together—even stronger than the king of the Pineys himself."

"You fool," I said to her.

I brought down my hands, that I'd lifted to make the Pineys stop for a moment. Thrusting them under Terry's nose, I showed her my fingers, the third fingers that were longer than the middle fingers.

"You fool," I said again. "I'm the king of the Pineys."



The Shadow from the Steeple

BY ROBERT BLOCH

WILLIAM HURLEY was born an Irishman and grew up to be a taxicab driver—therefore it would be redundant, in the face of both of these facts, to say that he was garrulous.

The minute he picked up his passenger in downtown Providence that warm summer evening, he began talking. The passenger, a tall thin man in his early thirties, entered the cab and sat back, clutching a briefcase. He gave an address on Benefit Street and Hurley started out, shifting both taxi and tongue into high gear.

Hurley began what was to be a one-

Heading by Charles A. Kennedy

...emeshed in a horror greater than any envisioned by his imagination.

sided conversation by commenting on the afternoon performance of the New York Giants. Unperturbed by his passenger's silence, he made a few remarks about the weather—recent, current, and expected. Since he received no reply, the driver then proceeded to discuss a local phenomenon; namely the reported escape, that morning, of two black panthers or leopards from the traveling menagerie of Langer Brothers Circus, currently appearing in the city. In response to a direct inquiry as to whether he had seen the beasts roaming at large, Hurley's customer shook his head.

The driver then made several uncomplimentary remarks about the local police force and their inability to capture the beasts. It was his considered opinion that a given platoon of law enforcement officers would be unable to catch a cold if immured in an ice-box for a year. This witticism failed to amuse his passenger, and before Hurley could continue his monologue they had arrived at the Benefit Street address. Eighty-five cents changed hands, passenger and briefcase left the cab, and Hurley drove away.

He could not know it at the time, but he thus became the last man who could or would testify to seeing his passenger alive.

The rest is conjecture, and perhaps that is for the best. Certainly it is easy enough to draw certain conclusions as to what happened that night in the old house on Benefit Street, but the weight of those conclusions is hard to bear.

One minor mystery is easy enough to clear up—the peculiar silence and aloofness of Hurley's passenger. That passenger, Edmund Fiske, of Chicago, Illinois, was meditating upon the fulfilment of fifteen years of questing; the cab-trip represented the last stage of this long journey, and he was reviewing the circumstances as he rode.

Edmund Fiske's quest had begun, on August 8, 1935, with the death of his close friend, Robert Harrison Blake, of Milwaukee.

Like Fiske himself at the time, Blake had been a precocious adolescent interested in fantasy-writing, and as such became a member of the "Lovecraft circle"—a group of writers maintaining correspondence with one another and with the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft, of Providence.

It was through correspondence that Fiske and Blake had become acquainted; they visited back and forth between Milwaukee and Chicago, and their mutual preoccupation with the weird and the fantastic in literature and art served to form the foundation for the close friendship which existed at the time of Blake's unexpected and inexplicable demise.

Most of the facts—and certain of the conjectures—in connection with Blake's death have been embodied in Lovecraft's story, *The Haunter of the Dark,* which was published more than a year after the younger writer's passing.

Lovecraft had an excellent opportunity to observe matters, for it was on his suggestion that young Blake had journeyed to Providence early in 1935, and had been provided with living-quarters on College Street by Lovecraft himself. So it was both as friend and neighbor that the elder fantasy writer had acted in narrating the singular story of Robert Harrison Blake's last months.

In his story, he tells of Blake's efforts to begin a novel dealing with a survival of New England witch-cults, but modestly omits his own part in assisting his friend to secure material. Apparently Blake began work on his project and then became enmeshed in a horror greater than any envisioned by his imagination.

For Blake was drawn to investigate the crumbling black pile on Federal Hill—the deserted ruin of a church that had once housed the worshippers of an esoteric cult. Early in spring he paid a visit to the shunned structure and there made certain discoveries which (in Lovecraft's opinion) made his death inevitable.

BRIEFLY, Blake entered the boarded-up Free Will Church and stumbled across the skeleton of a reporter from the *Providence Telegram,* one Edwin M. Lillibridge, who had apparently attempted a similar investigation in 1893. The fact that

his death was not explained seemed alarming enough, but more disturbing still was the realization that no one had been bold enough to enter the church since that date and discover the body.

Blake found the reporter's notebook in his clothing, and its contents afforded a partial revelation.

A certain Professor Bowen, of Providence, had traveled widely in Egypt, and in 1843, in the course of archeological investigations of the crypt of Nephren-Ka, had made an unusual find.

Nephren-Ka is the "forgotten pharaoh," whose name has been cursed by the priests and obliterated from official dynastic records. The name was familiar to the young writer at the time, due largely to the work of another Milwaukee author who had dealt with the semi-legendary ruler in his tale, *Fane of the Black Pharaoh*. But the discovery Bowen made in the crypt was totally unexpected.

The reporter's notebook said little of the actual nature of that discovery, but it recorded subsequent events in a precise, chronological fashion. Immediately upon unearthing his mysterious find in Egypt, Professor Bowen abandoned his research and returned to Providence, where he purchased the Free Will Church in 1844 and made it the headquarters of what was called the "Starry Wisdom" sect.

Members of this religious cult, evidently recruited by Bowen, professed to worship an entity they called the "Haunter of the Dark." By gazing into a crystal they summoned the actual presence of this entity and did homage with blood sacrifice.

Such, at least, was the fantastic story circulated in Providence at the time—and the church became a place to be avoided. Local superstition fanned agitation, and agitation precipitated direct action. In May of 1877 the sect was forcibly broken up by the authorities, due to public pressure, and several hundred of its members abruptly left the city.

The church itself was immediately closed, and apparently individual curiosity could not overcome the widespread fear which resulted in leaving the structure undisturbed and unexplored until the reporter, Lillibridge, made his ill-fated private investigation in 1893.

Such was the gist of the story unfolded in the pages of his notebook. Blake read it, but was nevertheless undeterred in his further scrutiny of the environs. Eventually he came upon the mysterious object Bowen had found in the Egyptian crypt—the object upon which the Starry Wisdom worship had been founded—the asymmetrical metal box with its curiously hinged lid, a lid that had not been closed for countless years. Blake thus gazed at the interior, gazed upon the four-inch red-black crystal polyhedron hanging suspended by seven supports. He not only gazed *at* but also *into* the polyhedron; just as the cult-worshippers had purportedly gazed, and with the same results. He was assailed by a curious psychic disturbance; he seemed to "see visions of other lands and the gulfs beyond the stars," as superstitious accounts had told.

And then Blake made his greatest mistake. He closed the box.

Closing the box—again, according to the superstitions annotated by Lillibridge—was the act that summoned the alien entity itself, the Haunter of the Dark. It was a creature of darkness and could not survive light. And in that boarded-up blackness of the ruined church, the thing emerged by night.

Blake fled the church in terror, but the damage was done. In mid-July, a thunderstorm put out the lights in Providence for an hour, and the Italian colony living near the deserted church heard bumping and thumping from inside the shadow-shrouded structure.

Crowds with candles stood outside in the rain and played candles upon the building, shielding themselves against the possible emergence of the feared entity by a barrier of light.

Apparently the story had remained alive throughout the neighborhood. Once the storm abated, local newspapers grew interested, and on the 17th of July two reporters entered the old church, together with a policeman. Nothing definite was found,

although there were curious and inexplicable smears and stains on the stairs and the pews.

Less than a month later—at 2:35 a.m. on the morning of August 8th, to be exact —Robert Harrison Blake met his death during an electrical storm while seated before the window of his room on College Street.

During the gathering storm, before his death occurred, Blake scribbled frantically in his diary, gradually revealing his innermost obsessions and delusions concerning the Haunter of the Dark. It was Blake's conviction that by gazing into the curious crystal in its box he had somehow established a linkage with the non-terrestrial entity. He further believed that closing the box had summoned the creature to dwell in the darkness of the church steeple, and that in some way his own fate was now irrevocably linked to that of the monstrosity.

All this is revealed in the last messages he set down while watching the progress of the storm from his window.

Meanwhile, at the church itself, on Federal Hill, a crowd of agitated spectators gathered to play lights upon the structure. That they heard alarming sounds from inside the boarded-up building is undeniable; at least two competent witnesses have testified to the fact. One, Father Merluzzo of the Spirito Santo Church, was on hand to quiet his congregation. The other, Patrolman (now Sergeant) William J. Monahan, of Central Station, was attempting to preserve order in the face of growing panic. Monahan himself saw the blinding "blur" that seemed to issue, smokelike, from the steeple of the ancient edifice as the final lightning-flash came.

Flash, meteor, fireball—call it what you will—erupted over the city in a blinding blaze; perhaps at the very moment that Robert Harrison Blake, across town, was writing, "Is it not an avatar of Nyarlathotep, who in antique and shadowy Khem even took the form of man?"

A few moments later he was dead. The coroner's physician rendered a verdict attributing his demise to "electrical shock" although the window he faced was unbroken. Another physician, known to Lovecraft, quarreled privately with that verdict and subsequently entered the affair the next day. Without legal authority, he entered the church and climbed to the windowless steeple where he discovered the strange asymmetrical—was it golden?—box and the curious stone within. Apparently his first gesture was to make sure of raising the lid and bringing the stone into the light. His next recorded gesture was to charter a boat, take box and curiously-angled stone aboard, and drop them into the deepest channel of Narragansett Bay.

There ended the admittedly fictionalized account of Blake's death as recorded by H. P. Lovecraft. And there began Edmund Fiske's fifteen-year quest.

Fiske, of course, had known some of the events outlined in the story. When Blake had left for Providence in the spring, Fiske had tentatively promised to join him the following autumn. At first, the two friends had exchanged letters regularly, but by early summer Blake ceased correspondence altogether.

At the time, Fiske was unaware of Blake's exploration of the ruined church. He could not account for Blake's silence, and wrote Lovecraft for a possible explanation.

Lovecraft could supply little information. Young Blake, he said, had visited with him frequently during the early weeks of his stay; had consulted with him about his writing, and had accompanied him on several nocturnal strolls through the city.

But during the summer, Blake's neighborliness ceased. It was not in Lovecraft's reclusive nature to impose himself upon others, and he did not seek to invade Blake's privacy for several weeks.

When he did so—and learned from the almost hysterical adolescent of his experiences in the forbidding, forbidden church on Federal Hill—Lovecraft offered words of warning and advice. But it was already too late. Within ten days of his visit came the shocking end.

Fiske learned of that end from Lovecraft on the following day. It was his task

to break the news to Blake's parents. For a time he was tempted to visit Providence immediately, but lack of funds and the pressure of his own domestic affairs forestalled him. The body of his young friend duly arrived and Fiske attended the brief ceremony of cremation.

Then Lovecraft began his own investigation—an investigation which ultimately resulted in the publication of his story. And there the matter might have rested.

But Fiske was not satisfied.

His best friend had died under circumstances which even the most skeptical must admit were mysterious. The local authorities summarily wrote off the matter with a fatuous and inadequate explanation.

Fiske determined to ascertain the truth.

BEAR in mind one salient fact—all three of these men, Lovecraft, Blake and Fiske—were professional writers and students of the supernatural or the supranormal. All three of them had extraordinary access to a bulk of written material dealing with ancient legend and superstition. Ironically enough, the use to which they put their knowledge was limited to excursions into so-called "fantasy fiction" but none of them, in the light of their own experience, could wholly join their reading audience in scoffing at the myths of which they wrote.

For, as Fiske wrote to Lovecraft, "the term, myth, as we know, is merely a polite euphemism. Blake's death was not a myth, but a hideous reality. I implore you to investigate fully. See this matter through to the end, for if Blake's diary holds even a distorted truth, there is no telling what may be loosed upon the world."

Lovecraft pledged cooperation, discovered the fate of the metal box and its contents, and endeavored to arrange a meeting with Doctor Ambrose Dexter, of Benefit Street. Doctor Dexter, it appeared, had left town immediately following his dramatic theft and disposal of the "Shining Trapezehedron," as Lovecraft called it.

Lovecraft then apparently interviewed Father Merluzzo and Patrolman Monahan, plunged into the files of the *Bulletin*, and endeavored to reconstruct the story of the Starry Wisdom sect and the entity they worshipped.

Of course he learned a good deal more than he dared to put into his magazine story. His letters to Edmund Fiske in the late fall and early spring of 1936 contain guarded hints and references to "menaces from Outside." But he seemed anxious to reassure Fiske that if there had been any menace, even in the realistic rather than the supernatural sense, the danger was now averted because Doctor Dexter had disposed of the Shining Trapezehedron which acted as a summoning talisman. Such was the gist of his report, and the matter rested there for a time.

Fiske made tentative arrangements, early in 1937, to visit Lovecraft at his home, with the private intention of doing some further research on his own into the cause of Blake's death. But once again, circumstances intervened. For in March of that year, Lovecraft died. His unexpected passing plunged Fiske into a period of mental despondency from which he was slow to recover; accordingly, it was not until almost a year later that Edmund Fiske paid his first visit to Providence, and to the scene of the tragic episodes which brought Blake's life to a close.

For somehow, always, a black undercurrent of suspicion existed. The coroner's physician had been glib, Lovecraft had been tactful, the press and general public had accepted matters completely—yet Blake was dead, and there had been an entity abroad in the night.

Fiske felt that if he could visit the accursed church himself, talk to Doctor Dexter and find out what had drawn him into the affair, interrogate the reporters, and pursue any relevant leads or clues he might eventually hope to uncover the truth and at least clear his dead friend's name of the ugly shadow of mental unbalance.

ACCORDINGLY, Fiske's first step after arriving in Providence and registering at a hotel was to set out for Federal Hill and the ruined church.

The search was doomed to immediate,

irremediable disappointment. For the church was no more. It had been razed the previous fall and the property taken over by the city authorities. The black and baleful spire no longer cast its spell over the Hill.

Fiske immediately took pains to see Father Merluzzo, at Spirito Santo, a few squares away. He learned from a courteous housekeeper that Father Merluzzo had died in 1936, within a year of young Blake.

Discouraged but persistent, Fiske next attempted to reach Doctor Dexter, but the old house on Benefit Street was boarded up. A call to the Physician's Service Bureau produced only the cryptic information that Ambrose Dexter, M.D., had left the city for an indeterminate stay.

Nor did a visit with the city editor of the *Bulletin* yield any better result. Fiske was permitted to go into the newspaper's morgue and read the aggravatingly short and matter-of-fact story on Blake's death, but the two reporters who had covered the assignment and subsequently visited the Federal Hill church had left the paper for berths in other cities.

There were, of course, other leads to follow, and during the ensuing week Fiske ran them all to the ground. A copy of *Who's Who* added nothing significant to his mental picture of Doctor Ambrose Dexter. The physician was Providence born, a life-long resident, 40 years of age, unmarried, a general practitioner, member of several medical societies—but there was no indication of any unusual "hobbies" or "other interests" which might provide a clue as to his participation in the affair.

Sergeant William J. Monahan of Central Station was sought out, and for the first time Fiske actually managed to speak to some one who admitted an actual connection with the events leading to Blake's death. Monahan was polite, but cautiously noncommittal.

Despite Fiske's complete unburdening, the police officer remained discreetly reticent.

"There's really nothing I can tell you," he said. "It's true, like Mister Lovecraft said, that I was at the church that night, for there was a rough crowd out and there's no telling what some of them ones in the neighborhood will do when riled up. Like the story said, the old church had a bad name, and I guess Sheeley could have given you many's the story."

"Sheeley?" interjected Fiske.

"Bert Sheeley—it was his beat, you know, not mine. He was ill of pneumonia at the time and I substituted for two weeks. Then, when he died—"

Fiske shook his head. Another possible source of information gone. Blake dead, Lovecraft dead, Father Merluzzo dead, and now Sheeley. Reporters scattered, and Doctor Dexter mysteriously missing. He sighed and persevered.

"That last night, when you saw the blur," he asked, "can you add anything by way of details? Were there any noises? Did anyone in the crowd say anything? Try to remember—whatever you can add may be of great help to me."

Monahan shook his head. "There were

noises aplenty," he said. "But what with the thunder and all, I couldn't rightly make out if anything came from inside the church, like the story has it. And as for the crowd, with the women wailing and the men muttering, all mixed up with thunderclaps and wind, it was as much as I could do to hear myself yelling to keep in place let alone make out what was being said."

"And the blur?" Fiske persisted.

"It was a blur, and that's all. Smoke, or a cloud, or just a shadow before the lightning struck again. But I'll not be saying I saw any devils, or monsters, or whatchamacallits as Mister Lovecraft would write about in those wild tales of his."

Sergeant Monahan shrugged self-righteously and picked up the desk-phone to answer a call. The interview was obviously at an end.

And so, for the nonce, was Fiske's quest. He didn't abandon hope, however. For a day he sat by his own hotel phone and called up every "Dexter" listed in the book in an effort to locate a relative of the missing doctor; but to no avail. Another day was spent in a small boat on Narragansett Bay, as Fiske assiduously and painstakingly familiarized himself with the location of the "deepest channel" alluded to in Lovecraft's story.

But at the end of a futile week in Providence, Fiske had to confess himself beaten. He returned to Chicago, his work, and his normal pursuits. Gradually the affair dropped out of the foreground of his consciousness, but he by no means forgot it completely or gave up the notion of eventually unravelling the mystetry—if mystery there was.

IN 1941, during a three-day furlough from Basic Training, Pvt. First Class Edmund Fiske passed through Providence on his way to New York City and again attempted to locate Dr. Ambrose Dexter, without success.

During 1942 and 1943, Sgt. Edmund Fiske wrote, from his stations overseas, to Dr. Ambrose Dexter, c/o General Delivery, Providence, R. I. His letters were never acknowledged, if indeed they were received.

In 1945, in a U.S.O. library lounge in Honolulu, Fiske read a report in—of all things—a journal on astro-physics which mentioned a recent gathering at Princeton University, at which the guest speaker, Dr. Ambrose Dexter, had delivered an address on "Practical Applications in Military Technology."

Fiske did not return to the States until the end of 1946. Domestic affairs, naturally, were the subject of his paramount consideration during the following year. It wasn't until 1948 that he accidentally came upon Dr. Dexter's name again—this time in a listing of "investigators in the field of nuclear physics" in a national weekly newsmagazine. He wrote the editors for further information, but received no reply. And another letter, dispatched to Providence, remained unanswered.

But in 1949, late in autumn, Dexter's name again came to his attention through the news columns; this time in relation to a discussion of work on the secret H-Bomb.

Whatever he guessed, whatever he feared, whatever he wildly imagined, Fiske was impelled to action. It was then that he wrote to a certain Ogden Purvis, a private investigator in the city of Providence, and commissioned him to locate Doctor Ambrose Dexter. All that he required was that he be placed in communication with Dexter, and he paid a substantial retainer fee. Purvis took the case.

The private detective sent several reports to Fiske in Chicago and they were, at first, disheartening. The Dexter residence was still untenanted. Dexter himself, according to the information elicited from governmental sources, was on a special mission. The private investigator seemed to assume from this that he was a person above reproach, engaged in confidential defense work.

Fiske's own reaction was panic.

He raised his offer of a fee and insisted that Ogden Purvis continue his efforts to find the elusive doctor.

Winter of 1950 came, and with it, an-

other report. The private investigator had tracked down every lead Fiske suggested, and one of them led, eventually to Tom Jonas.

Tom Jonas was the owner of the small boat which had been chartered by Doctor Dexter one evening in the late summer of 1935—the small boat which had been rowed to the "deepest channel of Narragansett Bay."

Tom Jonas had rested his oars as Dexter threw overboard the dully-gleaming, asymmetrical metal box with the hinged lid open to disclose the Shining Trapezehedron.

The old fisherman had spoken freely to the private detective; his words were reported in detail to Fiske via confidential report.

"Mighty peculiar" was Jonas' own reaction to the incident. Dexter had offered him "twenty smackers to take the boat out in the middle o' midnight and heave this funny-lookin' contraption overboard. Said there was no harm in it; said it was just an old keepsake he wanted to git rid of. But all the way out he kep' starin' at the sort of jewel-thing set in some iron bands inside the box, and mumblin' in some foreign language, I guess. No, 'tweren't French or German or Italian talk either. Polish, mebbe. I don't remember any words, either. But he acted sort-of drunk. Not that I'd say anything against Doctor Dexter, understand; comes of a fine old family, even if he ain't been around these parts since, to my knowing. But I figgered he was a bit under the influence, you might say. Else why would he pay me twenty smackers to do a crazy stunt like that?"

There was more to the verbatim transcript of the old fisherman's monologue, but it did not explain anything.

"He sure seemed glad to git rid of it, as I recollect. On the way back he told me to keep mum about it, but I can't see no harm in telling at this late date; I wouldn't hold anythin' back from the law."

Evidently the private investigator had made use of a rather unethical stratagem—posing as an actual detective in order to get Jonas to talk.

This did not bother Fiske, in Chicago. It was enough to get his grasp on something tangible at last; enough to make him send Purvis another payment, with instructions to keep up the search for Ambrose Dexter. Several months passed in waiting.

Then, in late spring, came the news Fiske had waited for. Doctor Dexter was back; he had returned to his house on Benefit Street. The boards had been removed, furniture vans appeared to discharge their contents, and a manservant appeared to answer the door, and to take telephone messages.

Doctor Dexter was not at home to the investigator, or to any one. He was, it appeared, recuperating from a severe illness contracted while in government service. He took a card from Purvis and promised to deliver a message, but repeated calls brought no indication of a reply.

Nor did Purvis, who conscientiously "cased" the house and neighborhood, ever succeed in laying eyes upon the doctor himself or in finding anyone who claimed to have seen the convalescent physician on the street.

Groceries were delivered regularly; mail appeared in the box; lights glowed in the Benefit Street house nightly until all hours.

As a matter of fact, this was the only concrete statement Purvis could make regarding any possible irregularity in Doctor Dexter's mode of life—he seemed to keep electricity burning twenty-four hours a day.

FISKE promptly dispatched another letter to Doctor Dexter, and then another. Still no acknowledgment or reply was forthcoming. And after several more unenlightening reports from Purvis, Fiske made up his mind. He would go to Providence and see Dexter, somehow, come what may.

He might be completely wrong in his suspicions; he might be completely wrong in his assumption that Doctor Dexter could clear the name of his dead friend; he might be completely wrong in even surmising any connection between the two—but for fifteen years he had brooded and wondered,

and it was time to put an end to his own inner conflict.

Accordingly, late that summer, Fiske wired Purvis of his intentions and instructed him to meet him at the hotel upon his arrival.

Thus it was that Edmund Fiske came to Providence for the last time; on the day that the Giants lost, on the day that the Langer Brothers lost their two black panthers, on the day that cabdriver William Hurley was in a garrulous mood.

Purvis was not at the hotel to meet him, but such was Fiske's own frenzy of impatience that he decided to act without him and drove, as we have seen, to Benefit Street in the early evening.

As the cab departed, Fiske stared up at the panelled doorway; stared at the lights blazing from the upper windows of the Georgian structure. A brass name-plate gleamed on the door itself, and the light from the windows played upon the legend, Ambrose Dexter, M.D.

Slight as it was, this seemed a reassuring touch to Edmund Fiske. The doctor was not concealing his presence in the house from the world, however much he might conceal his actual person. Surely the blazing lights and the appearance of the name-plate augured well.

Fiske shrugged, rang the bell.

The door opened quickly. A small, dark-skinned man with a slight stoop appeared and made a question of the word, "Yes?"

"Doctor Dexter, please."

"The Doctor is not in to callers. He is ill."

"Would you take a message, please?"

"Certainly." The dark-skinned servant smiled.

"Tell him that Edmund Fiske of Chicago wishes to see him at his convenience for a few moments. I have come all the way from the Middle West for this purpose, and what I have to speak to him about would take only a moment or two of his time."

"Wait, please."

The door closed. Fiske stood in the gathering darkness and transferred his briefcase from one hand to the other.

Abruptly, the door opened again. The servant peered out at him.

"Mr. Fiske—are you the gentleman who wrote the letters?"

"Letters—oh, yes, I am. I did not know the doctor ever received them."

The servant nodded. "I could not say. But Doctor Dexter said that if you were the man who had written him, you were to come right in."

Fiske permitted himself an audible sigh of relief as he stepped over the threshhold. It had taken him fifteen years to come this far, and now—

"Just go upstairs, if you please. You will find Doctor Dexter waiting in the study, right at the head of the hall."

EDMUND FISKE climbed the stairs, turned at the top to a doorway, and entered a room in which the light was an almost palpable presence, so intense was its glare.

And there, rising from a chair beside the fireplace, was Doctor Ambrose Dexter.

Fiske found himself facing a tall, thin, immaculately dressed man who may have been fifty but who scarcely looked thirty-five; a man whose wholly natural grace and elegance of movement concealed the sole incongruity of his aspect—a very deep suntan.

"So you are Edmund Fiske."

The voice was soft, well-modulated, and unmistakably New England—and the accompanying handclasp warm and firm. Doctor Dexter's smile was natural and friendly. White teeth gleamed against the brown background of his features.

"Won't you sit down?" invited the doctor. He indicated a chair and bowed slightly. Fiske couldn't help but stare; there was certainly no indication of any present or recent illness in his host's demeanor or behavior. As Doctor Dexter resumed his own seat near the fire and Fiske moved around the chair to join him, he noted the bookshelves on either side of the room. The size and shape of several volumes immediately engaged his rapt attention—so much that he hesitated before taking a seat, and instead inspected the titles of the tomes.

For the first time in his life, Edmund Fiske found himself confronting the half-legendary *De Vermis Mysteriis,* the *Liber Ivonis,* and the almost mythical Latin version of the *Necronomicon.* Without seeking his host's permission, he lifted the bulk of the latter volume from the shelf and riffled through the yellowed pages of the Spanish translation of 1622.

Then he turned to Doctor Dexter, and all traces of his carefully-contrived composure dropped away. "Then it must have been you who found these books in the church," he said. "In the rear vestry room beside the apse. Lovecraft mentioned them in his story, and I've always wondered what became of them."

Doctor Dexter nodded gravely. "Yes, I took them. I did not think it wise for such books to fall into the hands of authorities. You know what they contain, and what might happen if such knowledge were wrongfully employed."

Fiske reluctantly replaced the great book on the shelf and took a chair facing the doctor before the fire. He held his briefcase on his lap and fumbled uneasily with the clasp.

"Don't be uneasy," said Doctor Dexter, with a kindly smile. "Let us proceed without fencing. You are here to discover what part I played in the affair of your friend's death."

"Yes, there are some questions I wanted to ask."

"Please." The doctor raised a slim brown hand. "I am not in the best of health and can give you only a few minutes. Allow me to anticipate your queries and tell you what little I know."

"As you wish." Fiske stared at the bronzed man, wondering what lay behind the perfection of his poise.

"I met your friend Robert Harrison Blake only once," said Doctor Dexter. "It was on an evening during the latter part of July, 1935. He called upon me here, as a patient."

Fiske leaned forward eagerly. "I never knew that!" he exclaimed.

"There was no reason for anyone to know it," the doctor answered. "He was merely a patient. He claimed to be suffering from insomnia. I examined him, prescribed a sedative, and acting on the merest surmise, asked if he had recently been subjected to any unusual strain or trauma. It was then that he told me the story of his visit to the church on Federal Hill and of what he had found there. I must say that I had the acumen not to dismiss his tale as the product of a hysterical imagination. As a member of one of the older families here, I was already acquainted with the legends surrounding the Starry Wisdom sect and the so-called Haunter of the Dark.

"Young Blake confessed to me certain of his fears concerning the Shining Trapezehedron—intimating that it was a focal point of primal evil. He further admitted his own dread of being somehow linked to the monstrosity in the church.

"Naturally, I was not prepared to accept this last premise as a rational one. I attempted to reassure the young man, advised him to leave Providence and forget it. And at the time I acted in all good faith. And then, in August, came news of Blake's death."

"So you went to the church," Fiske said.

"Wouldn't you have done the same thing?" parried Doctor Dexter. "If Blake had come to you with this story, told you of what he feared, wouldn't his death have moved you to action? I assure you, I did what I thought best. Rather than provoke a scandal, rather than expose the general public to needless fears, rather than permit the possibility of danger to exist, I went to the church. I took the books. I took the Shining Trapezehedron from under the noses of the authorities. And I chartered a boat and dumped the accursed thing in Narragansett Bay, where it could no longer possibly harm mankind. The lid was up when I dropped it—for as you know, only darkness can summon the Haunter, and now the stone is eternally exposed to light.

"BUT that is all I can tell you. I regret that my work in recent years has prevented me from seeing or communicating

with you before this. I appreciate your interest in the affair and trust my remarks will help to clarify, in a small way, your bewilderment. As to young Blake, in my capacity as examining physician, I will gladly give you a written testimony to my belief in his sanity at the time of his death. I'll have it drawn up tomorrow and send it to your hotel if you give me the address. Fair enough?"

The doctor rose, signifying that the interview was over. Fiske remained seated, shifting his briefcase.

"Now if you will excuse me," the physician murmured.

"In a moment. There are still one or two brief questions I'd appreciate your answering."

"Certainly." If Doctor Dexter was irritated, he gave no sign.

"Did you by any chance see Lovecraft before or during his last illness?"

"No. I was not his physician. In fact, I never met the man, though of course I knew of him and his work."

"What caused you to leave Providence so abruptly after the Blake affair?"

"My interests in physics superseded my interest in medicine. As you may or may not know, during the past decade or more, I have been working on problems relative to atomic energy and nuclear fission. In fact, starting tomorrow, I am leaving Providence once more to deliver a course of lectures before the faculties of eastern universities and certain governmental groups."

"That is very interesting to me, Doctor," said Fiske. "By the way, did you ever meet Einstein?"

"As a matter of fact, I did, some years ago. I worked with him on—but no matter. I must beg you to excuse me, now. At another time, perhaps, we can discuss such things."

His impatience was unmistakable now. Fiske rose, lifting his briefcase in one hand and reaching out to extinguish a table-lamp with the other.

Doctor Dexter crossed swiftly and lighted the lamp again.

"Why are you afraid of the dark, Doctor?" asked Fiske, softly.

"I am not af—"

For the first time the physician seemed on the verge of losing his composure. "What makes you think that?" he whispered.

"It's the Shining Trapezehedron, isn't it?" Fiske continued. "When you threw it into the bay you acted too hastily. You didn't remember at the time that even if you left the lid open, the stone would be surrounded by darkness there at the bottom of the channel. Perhaps the Haunter didn't want you to remember. You looked into the stone just as Blake did, and established the same psychic linkage. And when you threw the thing away, you gave it into perpetual darkness, where the Haunter's power would feed and grow.

"That's why you left Providence—because you were afraid the Haunter would come to you, just as it came to Blake. And because you knew that now the thing would remain abroad forever."

Doctor Dexter moved towards the door. "I must definitely ask that you leave now," he said. "If you're implying that I keep the lights on because I'm afraid of the Haunter coming after me, the way it did Blake, then you're mistaken."

FISKE smiled wryly. "That's not it at all," he answered. "I know you don't fear that. Because it's too late. The Haunter must have come to you long before this—perhaps within a day or so after you gave it power by consigning the Trapezehedron to the darkness of the Bay. It came to you, but unlike the case of Blake, it did not kill you.

"It used you. That's why you fear the dark. You fear it as the Haunter itself fears being discovered. I believe that in the darkness you look *different*. More like the old shape. Because when the Haunter came to you, it did not kill but instead, *merged*. *You* are the Haunter of the Dark!"

"Mr. Fiske, really—"

"There is no Doctor Dexter. There hasn't been any such person for many years, now. There's only the outer shell, possessed by an entity older than the world; an entity that is moving quickly

and cunningly to bring destruction to all mankind. It was you who turned 'scientist' and insinuated yourself into the proper circles, hinting and prompting and assisting foolish men into their sudden 'discovery' of nuclear fission. When the first atomic bomb fell, how you must have laughed! And now you've given them the secret of the hydrogen bomb, and you're going on to teach them more, show them new ways to bring about their own destruction.

"It took me years of brooding to discover the clues, the keys to the so-called wild myths that Lovecraft wrote about. For he wrote in parable and allegory, but he wrote the truth. He has set it down in black and white time and again, the prophecy of your coming to earth—Blake knew it at the last when he identified the Haunter by its rightful name."

"And that is?" snapped the doctor.

"Nyarlathotep!"

The brown face creased into a grimace of laughter. "I'm afraid you're a victim of the same fantasy-projections as poor Blake and your friend Lovecraft. Everyone knows that Nyarlathotep is pure invention—part of the Lovecraft mythos."

"I thought so, until I found the clue in his poem. That's when it all fitted in; the Haunter of the Dark, your fleeing, and your sudden interest in scientific research. Lovecraft's words took on a new meaning:

And at last from inner Egypt came
The strange dark one to whom the
fellas bowed."

Fiske chanted the lines, staring at the dark face of the physician.

"Nonsense—if you must know, this dermatological disturbance of mine is the result of exposure to radiation at Los Alamos."

Fiske did not heed; he was continuing Lovecraft's poem:

"—That wild beasts followed him and licked his hands.
Soon from the sea a noxious birth began;/
Forgotten lands with weedy spires of gold.
The ground was cleft and mad auroras rolled
Down on the quaking cities of man.
Then crushing what he chanced to mould in play
The idiot Chaos blew Earth's dust away."

Doctor Dexter shook his head. "Ridiculous on the face of it," he asserted. "Surely, even in your—er—upset condition, you can understand that, man! The poem has no literal meaning. Do wild beasts lick my hands? Is something rising from the sea? Are there earthquakes and auroras? Nonsense! You're suffering from a bad case of what we call 'atomic jitters'—I can see it now. You're preoccupied, as so many laymen are today, with the foolish obsession that somehow our work in nuclear fission will result in the destruction of the earth. All this rationalization is a product of your imaginings."

FISKE held his briefcase tightly. "I told you it was a parable, this prophecy of Lovecraft's. God knows what he *knew* or *feared;* whatever it was, it was enough to make him cloak his meaning. And even then, perhaps, *they* got to him because he knew too much."

"They?"

"They from Outside—the ones you serve. You are their Messenger, Nyarlathotep. You came, in linkage with the Shining Trapezehedron, out of inner Egypt, as the poem says. And the fellahs—the common workers of Providence who became converted to the Starry Wisdom sect—bowed before the 'strange dark one' they worshipped as the Haunter.

"The Trapezehedron was thrown into the Bay, and soon from the sea came this noxious birth—your birth, or incarnation in the body of Doctor Dexter. And you taught men new methods of destruction; destruction with atomic bombs in which the 'ground was cleft and mad auroras rolled down on the quaking cities of man.' Oh, Lovecraft knew what he was writing,

and Blake recognized you, too. And they both died. I suppose you'll try to kill me now, so you can go on. You'll lecture, and stand at the elbows of the laboratory men urging them on and giving them new suggestions to result in greater destruction. And finally you'll blow earth's dust away."

"Please." Doctor Dexter held out both hands. "Control yourself—let me get you something! Can't you realize this whole thing is absurd?"

Fiske moved towards him, hands fumbling at the clasp of the briefcase. The flap opened, and Fiske reached inside, then withdrew his hand. He held a revolver now, and he pointed it quite steadily at Doctor Dexter's breast.

"Of course it's absurd," Fiske muttered. "No one ever believed in the Starry Wisdom sect except a few fanatics and some ignorant foreigners. No one ever took Blake's stories or Lovecraft's, or mine for that matter as anything but a rather morbid form of amusement. By the same token, no one will ever believe there is anything wrong with you, or with so-called scientific investigation of atomic energy, or the other horrors you plan to loose on the world to bring about its doom. And that's why I'm going to kill you now!"

"Put down that gun!"

FISKE began suddenly to tremble; his whole body shook in a spectacular spasm. Dexter noted it and moved forward. The younger man's eyes were bulging, and the physician inched towards him.

"Stand back!" Fiske warned. The words were distorted by the convulsive shuddering of his jaws. "That's all I needed to know. Since you are in a human body, you can be destroyed by ordinary weapons. And so I do destroy you—Nyarlathotep!"

His finger moved.

So did Doctor Dexter's. His hand went swiftly behind him, to the wall master-lightswitch. A click and the room was plunged into utter darkness.

Not utter darkness—for there was a glow.

The face and hands of Doctor Ambrose Dexter glowed with a phosphorescent fire in the dark. There are presumably forms of radium poisoning which can cause such an effect, and no doubt Doctor Dexter would have so explained the phenomenon to Edmund Fiske, had he the opportunity.

But there was no opportunity. Edmund Fiske heard the click, saw the fantastic flaming features, and pitched forward to the floor.

Doctor Dexter quietly switched on the lights, went over to the younger man's side and knelt for a long moment. He sought a pulse in vain.

Edmund Fiske was dead.

The doctor sighed, rose, and left the room. In the hall downstairs he summoned his servant.

"There has been a regrettable accident," he said. "That young visitor of mine—a hysteric—suffered a heart attack. You had better call the police, immediately. And then continue with the packing. We must leave tomorrow, for the lecture tour."

"But the police may detain you."

Doctor Dexter shook his head. "I think not. It's a clear-cut case. In any event, I can easily explain. When they arrive, notify me. I shall be in the garden."

The doctor proceeded down the hall to the rear exit and emerged upon the moonlit splendor of the garden behind the house on Benefit Street.

The radiant vista was walled off from the world, utterly deserted. The dark man stood in moonlight and its glow mingled with his own aura.

At this moment two silken shadows leaped over the wall. They crouched in the coolness of the garden, then slithered forward towards Doctor Dexter. They made panting sounds.

In the moonlight, he recognized the shapes of two black panthers.

Immobile, he waited as they advanced, padding purposefully towards him, eyes aglow, jaws slavering and agape.

Doctor Dexter turned away. His face was turned in mockery to the moon as the beasts fawned before him and licked his hands.

The Mirror

BY MILDRED JOHNSON

The old man had an obsession for locks. . . . .

WHILE Richard was locking the car, Margaret stood in the driveway looking up the ascending lawn to the house, sprawling, heavy with piazzas, ornamented with gingerbread and a dominant cupola, and thought how little it had changed in twenty-five years. Had it ever been painted? Undoubtedly so, she mused, but in the same dun yellow characteristic of the dignity and sombre respectability of the Thornbers, from Robert Thornber who built it in 1855 down the roll of

Heading by Vincent Napoli

generations to Richard himself. Not to her, though, she thought. She was sure she at least had escaped that ponderous solemnity bordering on arrogance which meant, in the factory town which bore their name, the Thornbers.

Richard, for instance—was he conscious of his cold pride? Watching him stride down the drive she saw in his sharp, pale face and full lips and pompous bearing a distillation of conceit. It was as if old Robert himself, whose stern-eyed picture commanded the upper hallway in the house she remembered, were living again. How unpleasant, she thought, to think so treacherously of her own brother.

Displaying a massive bunch of keys, he said contemptuously, "Look at this mess. The old boy was as bad as his mother apparently. She never threw away a thing in her life you know. But our dear Uncle Edward added to her whimsies by his obsession for locks. Do you know that he has every single shelf in the library locked separately? And wait until you see where the will is. I wanted to take it and put it in the firm safe deposit box, but he trusted no locks but his own, and so it's tucked away in a wooden box which in turn is locked in his strong box and the whole thing concealed in the wall safe in his room. And to cap it all Mrs. Foulkes couldn't find these keys until yesterday. I've had her looking for days. At one time we thought he might have tossed them out of the window, because he couldn't leave the bed."

"Where were they?"

"In the mattress. The old bird had managed somehow to make a hole and stuff them in."

"The poor old man, he must have become very confused at the end."

They were at the door and Richard began trying various keys.

"Between you and me, Meg, he was more than confused, but of course that's off the record. We'll have enough trouble as it is probating the will. Those old women aren't going to let it go through without a contest. They told me so when we were at the cemetery. I saw Aggie bending your ear. Why is it that woman always reminds me of a rat—must be those rodent teeth—what was she saying?"

"I didn't listen closely, because I felt too depressed, but she said something about undue influence and how I was too sensible a person to be a party to fraud. She seemed very bitter, but somehow a funeral isn't the place to air one's animosity. But why should the old ladies contest the will? You said they're getting their share, didn't you?"

He found the key and opened the door as he answered her. "They are—and a very good share too. The part they object to is my getting the library. That's going to be the bone of contention. You see Tom Bryce, who'll probably represent them, has put some very active bees in their bonnets about it."

"Do they want the books?"

"No, my dear, not the books themselves. They want them sold at auction so that they can share proportionately in the proceeds."

"I didn't know they were valuable."

THEY stepped into the hall and all other ideas were wiped from her mind as she stared about, awe, dread, all the nervousness of childhood, rolling over her. Was it something about the hall itself—the ghastly light sifting through the green panes above the door, the fungus smell of the walls, the high, vaulted ceiling—or was it only the memory of fear that made her think of a sepulchre? In the center the staircase, carpeted thickly in maroon, wound upward into shadow; at the left was the dining room, dark, the blinds drawn, the heavy walnut furniture looming indistinctly. She recalled being afraid of it, especially the sideboard, the front of it being carved in patterns which, in her childish fancy, had resembled devils. Even before the final day of terror so long ago she had been afraid in the house.

Richard walked to the right, to the living room, and she followed. Perhaps because it alone, of all the rooms, had been spared the colored window glass, it was bright, almost cheerful by contrast, although it could have been transferred intact to a museum as an example of Victorian atrocity

in decor with its convoluted whatnots, its tables draped with green baize cloths as heavy as rugs, its wax flowers under glass, its chairs buried under embroidered satin cushions. She noticed the same old dusty grasses were still dangling over the mantelpiece, the examples of Samoan flora a remote Thornber ancestor had brought back from a clipper voyage.

"It's exactly the same," she said. "Exactly. Nothing has been added or taken away, or moved even an inch as far as I can see. And it all belongs to me. Great Scott—what am I going to do with it?"

"You'll be able to sell it. There are people who'll buy anything so long as it's old. But come into the library. I want to show you the books."

That, too, was as stark as ever; the glass-enclosed shelves covering the walls to the ceiling, a baronial table in the center, leather chairs before the fireplace, ugly busts—she recognized Dante, Shakespeare, Socrates—in the corners.

"It looks like a branch of a public library," she said.

"You wouldn't find anything like this in a public library," he said, selecting a small brass key from the ring and unlocking one of the cases from which he took out a book bound in green morocco. He held it reverently, as if weighing it, felt the edges and stroked the binding before opening it. *"The Faerie Queene,"* he pointed out. "First edition—think of it! And here's a Kilmarnock Burns and a first Beaumont and Fletcher, in boards, with nineteen errors in pagination. And it's only a part of it. Say what you want about old Robert's taste—in books it was impeccable. You know he had a standing *carte blanche* order at Quaritch's. Here, in this architectural monstrosity, in this crummy mill town, are some of the finest volumes in the country—in the world I dare say, and for over three-quarters of a century they've been buried here, never appearing in the auction rooms. And as far as I'm concerned they never will. I hope you'll start your boy early on the joys of book collecting, because I'll leave them to him."

He returned the book to the shelf, locked the case, and stood fingering the key, a half-smile on his lips. "I was in law school before I learned the meaning of fine books," he said. "But as soon as I had acquired the taste I appropriated this library. Since then I've considered it mine. When I think of all the weekends I've spent out here playing endless games of cribbage with the old bag of bones and listening to his idiocies, with all these priceless volumes waiting, like me, for the technicality of his death—and they call that undue influence!"

"I don't. I think you deserved them, Dick," she said. "But I'm afraid it would have taken more than a libraryful of rare books to get me out here. I'm thankful I was far enough away so that it was never expected of me. As it is I can't understand why he left me the furniture and silver. The last time I saw him was at my wedding."

"He always liked Mother—although I do think you carried the thing a bit too far not coming here at all. I can understand it when you were little, but not later on."

"Truly, Dick, it's only within the past few years that I've recovered from the shock. I still had nightmares after I was grown up. That must have been what they call a traumatic experience."

"You made too much fuss about it. You knew Grandmother was crazy. Well, we'd better get the will and go on before it gets dark."

"I'll stay down here if you don't mind. Seeing that room again isn't to my liking."

"You're a fool, Meg."

HE LEFT her and she sat in a straight chair near the window and felt the memories of the house stirring about her. Once it stood majestic on this hill, crowning it nobly, thick woods in the valley screening the factory chimneys, but now the little jerry-built houses were encroaching—she could see them at the foot of the hill—the rabble smothering the king. And now the aunts would probably sell the house and let them swallow it up entirely. She thought of it with mingled regret and pleasure.

She tried to hold her thoughts away from that day; she cast around for subjects. She even thought of her great-uncle and his pitiful, parchment face in the casket, but that

picture led inevitably to others—and to the mirror. . . .

SHE had been seven, Richard twelve. Their mother, newly-married, had taken them to say good-bye to their great-grandmother and great-uncle Edward. They were leaving for Seattle, the home of their stepfather, the next day. She remembered how their uncle led them in a group up the stairs to see his mother; she recalled the unnatural quietness and awe which fell upon them all as they walked softly up the stairs. There were Aunts Aggie and Grace, their mother and Mr. Barclay, their stepfather, and Dick and Margaret in solemn procession behind Uncle Edward who, even then, seemed of immense age and walked with difficulty.

They turned to the right at the head of the stairs and waited while Edward rapped lightly at the door. Their faces had looked strange and drawn in the aqueous light from the window in the upper hall.

"May we come in, Mother?" Edward had called.

"Wait!" a cracked voice answered. They waited, and Mr. Barclay smiled a little as if he thought it all very amusing.

At last the queer voice told them to come in. Margaret hung back, so that it was some time before she saw her great-grandmother. Instead she looked about the room. Facing the door, on the left, was a tester bed covered by a patchwork quilt. At the right of the bed, against the wall, was a large dark dresser with an adjustable mirror. Then the adults opened their ranks to allow the children to come forward and she saw Gran sitting in a rocking chair in the cupola, her tiny feet swinging above the floor, her back straight, her face wrinkled and brown like a walnut and her black eyes glittering like jet beads. She looked at Richard brightly.

"Come here, Mark, and let your Granny kiss you," she said.

"This isn't Mark," Edward explained. "It's his son, Richard."

"Where's Mark?"

"Mark is dead, Mother," Edward said gently.

The little feet touched the floor and the old woman began to rock. "Yes, that is so," she said. "Mark is dead. He has a good grave, a dry grave, like my sons'. One can bear to look at them in dry graves. They put my husband in a wet grave and he became swollen and dreadful to see before the flesh fell away. It is all the same then—all the same—"

Aunt Aggie gasped and Edward said quickly, "Mother, Mark's children are here. They're going far away and they want to say good-bye."

"Come and kiss me," she ordered. Dick, very red in the face, stepped up and kissed her cheek. She whispered something in his ear and chuckled to herself. "Don't be afraid," she said to Margaret. "I'm not dead yet." Trembling, Margaret kissed her quickly at the corner of the mouth. She was warm and dry and smelled of sour bread.

After dinner Edward showed the adults around the garden while the children looked at stereopticon views in the library. When the voices of the grownups could be heard in the distance, Richard checked their whereabouts from the window and then said to Margaret, "Come on. Let's go upstairs to Gran."

"No. I don't want to."

"Oh come on. Don't be a baby. You know what she told me? She said if we'd go up there alone she'd show us something nobody else in the whole world except her has ever seen."

"I don't want to see it. I don't like her. She's so *old*, and she smells funny."

"Come along. Maybe she'll give us something. She's very rich. She has pots of money. Everybody knows that."

And so Margaret had gone upstairs with Richard, sidling into the room behind him after the ritual of the tap and the call to enter. When she saw them their grandmother rocked in pleasure and grinned toothlessly. "You came," she said. "You didn't forget."

"You said you'd show us something nobody else has ever seen," Richard said doggedly.

"That I will. You're Mark's children and he would want you to see it because he is dead. Edward mustn't see it. His father wouldn't want him to see it. He has said so."

She went on in that confused fashion for a few minutes and then darted forward like a bird, felt under the red plush cushion of the window seat next to her and took out a bronze object, rectangular in shape and ornately molded. She laid it flat on her lap, rested their mottled, veined hands on it and looked at the carpet as if praying. Then she said, "Here is my mirror, my own mirror."

"That doesn't look like a mirror," Richard said.

"It is closed. It is closed, like eyes that do not see. But when this mirror is open, we can see our dead. My husband whom I hated and my sons whom I loved—they're all here—and your father is here too, if you want to see him. He looks very well, because they embalmed him and his coffin is strong—my husband is clean and smooth now—a skull at last—you won't see him —I won't let you see him—.

Margaret couldn't breathe. Tighter and tighter she gripped Richard's hand.

"That's crazy!" he said angrily. "How can you see a person after he's dead?"

Cackling in excitement, the old woman fumbled for a catch at the top of the object —but Margaret could stand no more. She began to scream and Mrs. Foulkes, the servant, rushed in at once.

"What are you doing?" she demanded. "What are you saying to these children?"

Mrs. Foulkes took them away, Margaret clinging to her, still screaming.

"Silly little girl!" sneered the old woman.

THE memory of her own cries mingled with the actuality of Richard calling her name from the landing. "For heaven's sake hurry up!" he said, when she reached the hall. His face was flushed. "Look, will you telephone Mrs. Foulkes and ask her what the devil happened to the will?"

"Isn't it in the safe?"

"Why do you think I'm asking you to call her?"

"Is the phone connected?"

"Of course it is—Meg, please! Will you stop asking foolish questions? While you're calling her I'll look around the room. I'll look in the mattress."

Margaret went to the telephone at the end of the hall, and, hesitant about questioning Richard about Mrs. Foulkes' number, searched through the drawer of the little table until she found an address book. It had Mrs. Foulkes' name in it and a telephone number listed, her daughter's. Margaret remembered then that Mrs. Foulkes had mentioned that she was going to take off her shoes and go out to pasture for the rest of her life. After thirty-five years of service to the Thornbers she deserved it, Margaret thought, as she gave the number to the girl at the exchange. The annuity Edward had arranged for her in the last year of his life could be only a token payment for such loyalty.

Mrs. Foulkes asked Margaret's question, "Isn't it in the safe?"

"Apparently not."

"That's funny. He didn't ask me to get it for him. I wonder if he could have got out of bed and got it for himself? One thing I'm positive of—it never left the room. I'd have seen it if it did. It certainly must be there."

"We'll look around. As you say, he probably found the strength to hop out of bed for a few minutes."

"If you don't find it, I'll come over and help you look."

"Oh, no, we wouldn't want you to do that. It must be somewhere in the room. We'll find it."

Margaret thanked her and promised to let her know the outcome of the search. Then she went to the foot of the stairs to tell Richard, but he appeared before she could call him. Bits of lint and feathers were all over his hair and coat. "Well?" he said.

"It never left the room. She's sure about that."

"She's sure about it, is she? She's sure about nothing now except that she's got hers. Little she cares about anything else."

"You didn't find it, then?"

"No, I didn't. Come up here and help me."

She stopped in the upper hall, unsure of the room until she heard grating sounds from the front chamber, as if Richard were smashing the furniture. "So he moved into

Gran's room?" she murmured, at the door, but her brother was too busy to reply.

The bed was covered with feathers and strips of the mattress. He had torn it to ribbons and disembowled it. And now he was pulling clothing from the drawers, tossing it right and left, and when the drawer was empty, he kicked the bottom until it caved in. "Got to make sure about secret compartments," he muttered, and, seeing Meg, shouted, "Come on—get going! Look in the closet. Take everything out, look in every pocket, go through the linings of the coats and look in the trouser cuffs. It isn't a heavy document. He might have hidden it anywhere."

The wall safe was swung back and its contents, boxes, jewelry, papers, scattered over the table. "I assume you went through everything carefully," she remarked.

He fairly hissed in irritation. "Think I'm blind? I've been through every scrap of paper three times. The old fool was bound he was going to read that will!"

"Why—didn't he read it before he executed it?"

"Read it? It took me six months to satisfy him with it! It went through twenty drafts at least, each one radically different from the others. At one time the whole library was bequeathed to the Thornber Historical Society. Thank God that was changed! On the day he signed it I had to rush out and haul in some neighbors for witnesses before he changed his mind again." He made a gesture of annoyance. "But I don't want to stand here talking about it. Let's find it first."

She took the suits out one by one and felt through them carefully, feeling pangs of pity for their smallness and the blobs of food on the front and the lapels. "You'd think someone would have cleaned these," she said.

"It would have been a waste of time having them cleaned every time he wore them. In the last few years he got more of his meals on his coat than in his stomach. And he wouldn't let anyone touch his things until they reeked. What are you doing? Here—that's no way to do it." He took one of the coats from her, flourished his pocket-knife again and ripped out the lining completely. She felt sad, unaccountably close to tears. So soon to take the old man's private, cherished possessions and destroy them!

"Is that necessary?" she said.

He sighed heavily. She saw that his face was becoming bloated with anger. "All right. Let me do it. You look under the cushions and around the chair edges."

When she had finished the chairs she looked behind the pictures and by that time all Edward's garments were in a heap on the floor and Richard was standing near the window pounding his palm with his fist. "It's got to be found," he said. "If I appear in court with my carbon copy, my chances drop 50 per cent. Those old women have their hooks in me too deeply to let me try to probate a copy, even though I can prove the execution of the original. Rather than see me get the library they'd give it away. Well, I'll find it, that's all there is to it. It's in here somewhere. It's *got* to be in here! No, it's not under the carpets. I looked there first. Now let's reconstruct the scene. Here's the old fellow in bed, presumably too sick to move. He'd go over to the safe, four steps at the most, get out the will—and then he'd have to sit down. He'd sit here in the rocking chair I imagine. Perhaps he'd read it, and then he'd get up—or perhaps not. Meg—the window seats!"

He leaped into the cupola and lifted the cushions from the seats. "Is it there?" Margaret said.

"No. I was sure it would be. But here's that plate thing of Gran's."

He came out holding it in both hands. As she came up, half fearfully, to see it, he set it on the dresser and switched on the bracket light. She looked down and started.

"Dick, that's the mirror!" she whispered, staring at it in sickening fascination. In dimming twilight, with their shadows flickering on the wall, and a physical part of the memory before her eyes, she was seven again, feeling the giddiness of fear, her heart moving up—up— "I feel frightened," she said.

"Of what? Of a copper plate? That's all it is." He ran his hand through his hair and looked about. "I'm stumped," he said.

"Perhaps we ought to come back tomorrow, when it's light."

"If you're getting tired you can go," he burst out. "But I'll stay here and find that will if it takes me all night. *Where* can it be—where—where?"

She was looking at the motif of the decoration on the object. There were six heads, in sequence, the first of a young woman with flowing hair, her eyes closed; the second of another woman, or perhaps the same, with tangled hair and sunken cheeks; the third—— "Dick!" she cried Look! Isn't that horrible?" The faces changed, became fleshless, and the last was a grinning skull. "Can you see what it mean? It shows the distintegration of a corpse!"

He barely looked at it. "Well, you can see now where the old woman got her ideas." Suddenly he jumped forward and began to paw it eagerly. "Remember, didn't she say it opens? We've found it—we've found the will, Meg! Damn this thing, how does it open? Here try it. Your fingers are more sensitive."

With her hands shaking she felt the rim, as she recalled Gran had done. Without realizing it she touched a pin and the bronze doors divided with a snap, opening into a mirrored triptych. The action was so unexpected that she screamed a little, and, at the same time, Richard cried out, but his cry was of pleasure, for there, pressed crosswise across the base mirror, was a blue-backed document.

"Meg, darling—we've found it!" he shouted, taking her arms and shaking her.

He opened it and moved under the lamp to read it. She looked down at the mirror. Nothing was reflected except her own white face, her hat on one side, wisps of hair protruding. She straightened her hat and pushed back her hair. Her fingers were cold. Richard was still reading, turning to the last page. Then a scrap of paper fluttered to the floor. He picked it up, gaped at it—then handed it to Margaret, who took it in wonder. It was a signature, "Edward Thornber," followed by a red seal; above it, on the jagged edge, were some lines of typewriting: ". . . hand and seal this 12th day of. . . ."

She looked back at Richard. The veins on his forehead were distended, his eyes bloodshot. Fury rose into his face and erupted at last in a bellow: "See what he's done? He's torn out his signature—he's invalidated the will!"

Pounding his flat hand on the dresser he shouted his stupendous rage to the house. Margaret touched his arms, tried to speak, but he shook her off.

"So you think you've beaten me, you sniveling, whining hypocrite?" he cried. He closed his eyes and cursed his uncle slowly, savagely. Margaret stepped backward, shaking her head.

"Don't," she entreated. "It's not right—"

"What do you know about it? You've never wanted anything the way I wanted that library! And I'll have it—I'll have it—I'll do more than substitute a will—I'll forge one! I can do it, I can trace the signatures, nobody will ever know—"

Gibbering, he bent over the dresser, outlining the witnesses' signatures with his fingers. Suddenly he straightened, and pointed to the left of the will—and a piercing scream shook the walls, filled the room—and before it died there was another and another. And Margaret looked about blinded with terror for a second before realizing it was Richard screaming, shrieking like a soul gone mad. Before she could reach him he picked up the mirror and flung it at the wall. It shattered and crashed to the floor.

Richard was not screaming now. His head lolled and his eyes were vague and his hands groped. "It was *he*," he whispered. "He was there, in his coffin, in the mirror—laughing—"

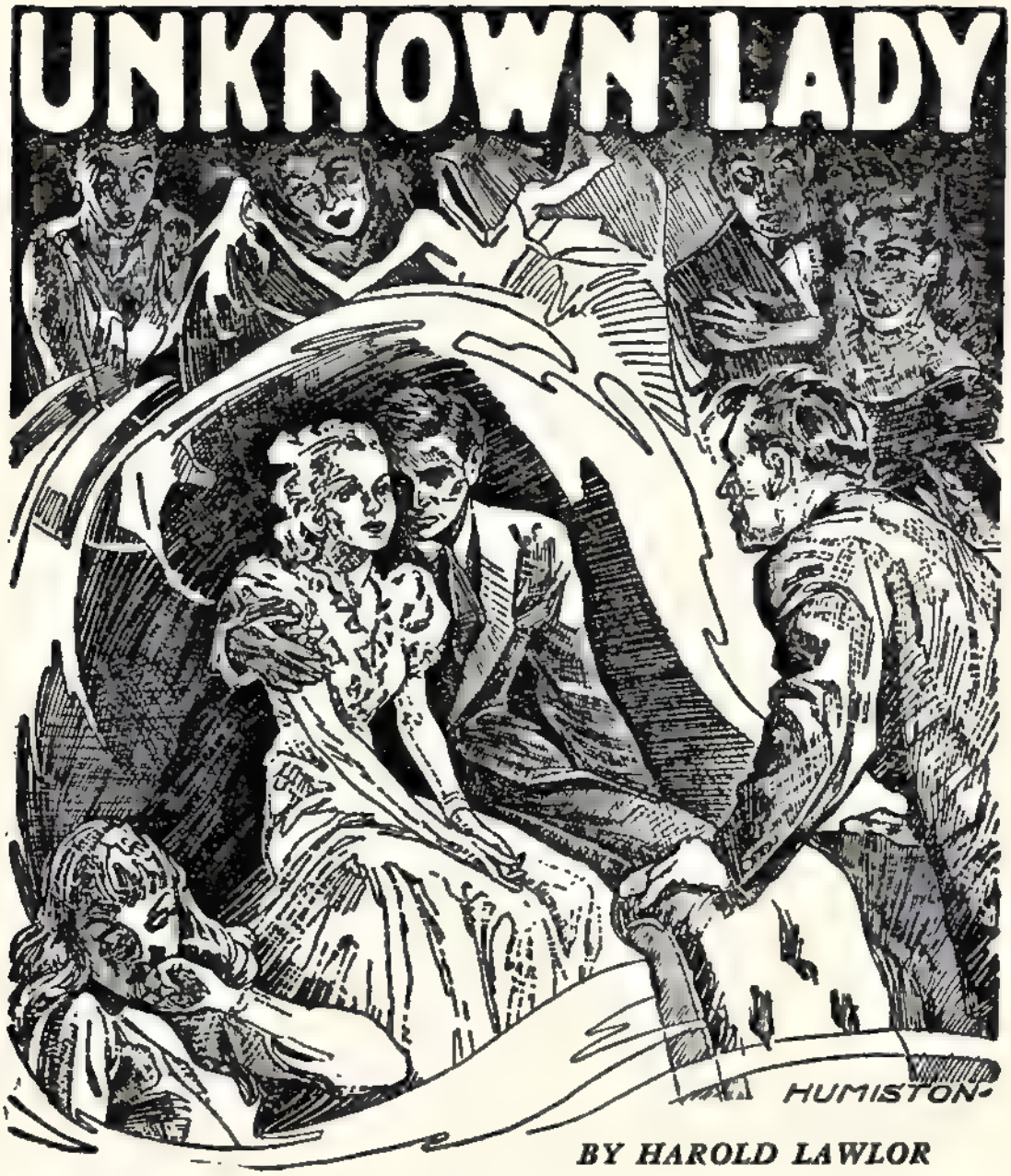
Sobbing he leaned heavily against his sister.

Was it not odd, Jules de Grandin asked himself, that two people should have the same delusions at approximately the same time?

"The Body Snatchers" . . by . . SEABURY QUINN

. . . . *in the next* WEIRD TALES . . . .

UNKNOWN LADY



BY HAROLD LAWLOR

No one, absolutely no one, was to sit on the left-hand side of the love seat.

NOW that I suspect the whole truth, I don't know what to tell Greg Leyden, and the suspicion occurs to me that perhaps the kindest thing I can do for him is keep my mouth shut. I know I'm responsible in a way for what has befallen him, for I was at least the innocent motivation of the whole thing. On the other hand, he has never been any real friend of mine. As someone once immortally said, I never liked him and I always will.

You see, I write fantastic stories, stories

Heading by Fred Humiston

of free imagination, about ghosts and goblins and djinns and werewolves and other assorted horrors; and while I may be no beacon light in American Letters, my friends are always careful to say they like my stories, or to lie like gentlemen if they don't—some native shrewdness warning them that fiction writers are as hammy at heart as operatic divas.

But Greg Leyden was not of these.

On the only occasion that I was so misguided as to show him one of my published tales, he looked through it, tossed the magazine aside indifferently, and sneered:

"Do you really believe that stuff?"

I don't know why such a question should be so particularly enraging, but I invariably find it so.

"Certainly, I believe it!" I answered now, annoyed. "If I didn't believe in it at least while I was writing it, how do you think I could ever convince my readers, if any, that it really happened?"

His sneer deepened. "You must have a diseased imagination," he said.

I tightened my lips, and by the grace of God I managed to say nothing. For I have grown too old, and too wise, I hope, and certainly too indifferent by far to waste any more time futilely trying to justify myself to anyone.

But naturally Greg Leyden had not endeared himself to me.

As it happened, my friend, Ed Sharpe, was present when Greg Leyden offered this opinion of my imagination—and thus, by indirection, his low opinion also of me and my literary talents, if I may be permitted so to call them. Ed said nothing at the time, either—principally, as he told me afterward, because he was too busy marveling at and admiring my self-restraint.

But when Greg had left, Ed turned to me, shaking his head. "Did you get the irony, Al, of that 'diseased imagination' crack?"

I had, of course, and it had deepened my fury. I knew just what Ed meant.

You'll know what we're talking about when I tell you that Greg Leyden is one of those people who are congenitally incapable of believing that they are not right in the very center of things. Just mention casually that you've been some place, or have done something, or have seen something, and Greg will pop right up with the information that oh, yes, he's been there, too, that he has seen or done the very same thing; only he has stayed longer, or seen more, or done better than you did, if you know what I mean.

These artless confidences of his are supposed to bowl us over with sheer surprise and subtly lessen the magnitude of our own accomplishments, but naturally we all know that he is lying. He has tripped himself up a hundred times. We've always let it go in the past, because it never seemed worthwhile baldly to call him a liar. But we all know that when it comes to topping our own stories he certainly has a very active imagination.

You might even call it a "diseased" imagination, as he had so churlishly called mine.

So much for Greg Leyden, for the present.

THE next thing that has bearing on the peculiar story of Greg Leyden is the apparently unrelated fact that Marie and I, at long last, had found a vacant house to rent.

Ever since we'd been married, Marie and I had been living with her parents. Now they're good scouts, and we're grateful to them for taking us in, and we love them dearly—or we would if we didn't see them too often. But the fact remains that they are old, and they disapprove of a surprising number of things, and they talk our ear off besides.

But we didn't leap to sign a lease on the vacant house, and neither would you have, in these times.

"There must be something wrong with the place," were Marie's first words, as we stood on the sidewalk regarding the vacant house.

The real estate man who had showed us the property had very considerately stepped aside for a space to give us a chance to talk things over.

"Yeah, I know what you mean," I said,

scratching my head. I was really bothered. Something must have decayed in Denmark, but for the life of me I couldn't detect any odor. "I can't see what can be wrong with it, though. The plumbing works, the roof doesn't leak, the oil burner seems to be okay, and the place is spotlessly clean and doesn't even need redecorating."

It was a really handsome little white-painted ranch house of brick, with a dubonnet-tiled bath and cabinet kitchen over which Marie had made moans ecstatically. The neighborhood was not only upper-middle-class, but convenient besides.

"But why is it vacant in a housing shortage time like this?" Marie fretted. "And just look at the way that real estate man has been acting. So—so apprehensive, as if he's afraid we're going to *ask* him what's wrong with it."

He had given me that impression too. "Well, we *could* ask him," I said.

Marie had a sniff for such male obtuseness. "He'd only lie, or evade the question."

"On the other hand," I said, "if we go on living with your folks—"

"I know," Marie sighed. "Poor darlings! If I hear just once more how much better *they* managed things at our age, how much more sense *they* had, how much more quiet and refined *their* friends were—"

"And so forth and so on," I said.

THE upshot of it was that against our better judgment, we asked no question, but signed the lease and took the house. But both of us spent many a sleepless night before we moved in, and the dire predictions of my parents-in-law did nothing to ease our minds.

That first month we were in the place, we lived in a state of uneasy suspension, holding our breath. And then ecstasy took over completely, while we listened smugly to the envious exclamations of our friends. Nothing seemed to be wrong, after all. The house was well-nigh perfect, and we wondered at our earlier qualms.

"When I think of how we *worried*!" Marie kept saying at intervals. "How near we came to passing it up!"

"What dopes we were," I agreed.

"It was an act of Providence that we didn't listen to ourselves, that's what it was!"

Ah, well. It's nice that we had those few moments of self-congratulation. For you live and learn. Painfully.

It was Ed and Alice Sharpe who talked us into giving that ill-fated housewarming party.

Ed dearly loves to plan things, especially when he knows that somebody else is going to do all the work.

"Just ask a few of the choicer souls," he advised us. "We'll all bring our own drinks, and Alice here will bake a ham—"

"Oh, God, I knew it!" Alice said. "I always wind up baking a ham."

"—and all in all," Ed finished largely, "it will hardly cost you a dime."

As Marie says, Ed can sell anybody anything. He's a big, blond, urchin-faced six-footer, and a practical joker to boot.

But we manage to stand him most of the time.

"Just remember one thing," I told him sternly, "and warn everybody else. The furniture isn't paid for, and we'd like to keep it in one piece till it is."

So the party was on for a week from the coming Saturday night. And it was at the party that Ed had his brilliant idea for a joke on Greg Leyden—that joke which was to have its repercussion and such a strange sequel.

"We'll keep the party small," Marie said, making up the guest list. "After all, if we ask the whole gang, those hoodlums'll claw the walls down." She checked the list off on her fingers. "Let's see now. Besides ourselves and the Sharpes, we'll just have Carl and Edna Johnson, Jack and Pinky Ahern, Joe Benning and that redheaded model he runs around with—she's so dumb she lays me out—and oh, yes! Greg Leyden, and some girl for him."

"Ah, now, why Greg Leyden?" I groaned.

"Because we always ask him."

It was true enough. We always did seem to ask him, though none of us really liked him. I wondered about it for the first time,

and now that I came to think of it, it seemed simple enough. He'd just wormed his way insidiously into the crowd, though in the beginning he'd only been the acquaintance of a friend of one of the members, asked once to fill in in an emergency.

"Why shouldn't we ask Greg Leyden?" Marie wanted to know now.

"Well, nobody seems to like him. Besides," I stuck out my lower lip, "he says I have a diseased imagination."

"Too bad about you."

"And, anyway," I said, "he never has a girl. Most of them have sense enough not to go out with him more than once."

"Then we'll get one for him," Marie said, ending the argument. "We'll just wish that little job on Ed Sharpe, since the party was his big idea in the first place. High time he did some of the work."

So I called Ed on the phone and told him, and of course he hollered like a stuck pig.

"Why am I always the patsy?" he groaned. "I've found twenty-eleven dates for that character in the past, and he didn't like any one of them. Who does he think he is, anyway, Gable? Why don't you suck somebody else in, for a change?"

"Have done, rogue! Condolences, and all that, but Marie says it's mandatory. No date for Greg, no party."

"And I thought she was a friend of mine! Well, all right. Just this once more, though who I'm going to get—!"

I hung up on him.

The phone rang.

"I suppose we'll even have to haul her over there for him!" Ed's voice said bitterly.

He hung up on me.

AND of course, as luck would have it, he and Alice showed up at the party that Saturday night with a bottle of Scotch and a baked ham, but no date for Greg. If they'd brought somebody, nothing would have happened.

And there'd be no story for me to tell.

Everybody else was there but Greg, when Ed and Alice came in alone. Marie had a fit, in a refined sort of way, when she saw they'd brought no girl for Greg.

"Now, Ed, you promised!" she wailed. "I've already told Greg you have the most fascinating female in the world lined up for him."

Alice stuck up for her husband. "He tried, dear, really he did. He's been hanging on the phone all week, poor darling."

"Look at me!" Ed boomed. "I'm a wraith, my dear. Naught but a shadow of my former self."

"You're a pain in the neck, that's what you are," Marie said.

Alice said defensively, "It isn't his fault. As soon as he told the girls the date was with Greg, they all turned him down. Even Puff Madison said no, and you know Puff, *she'll* go out with anybody, just so long as he's white and under ninety. So you see? It was really hopeless."

"But what am I going to tell Greg?" Marie wailed again.

"His best friends won't tell him," Ed said.

"I can't understand it," said Elaine, Joe Benning's redheaded friend. "*I* think Greg Leyden is a *cute* little guy."

But no one paid any attention to her, for it's a well-known fact that Elaine's heart is nearly as soft as her brain.

Still, it's true enough that Greg is not a repulsive-looking fellow, and I hope I haven't given you the idea that he is. On the contrary, he's really good-looking. It's true that he's short, but he's well-proportioned for his size and has good features, with soft brown eyes like a spaniel's.

It's probably because of his eyes that we've never been able to blow him off. He makes those sarcastic comments of his, but if you try to retaliate, his eyes get that hurt, wounded look so that you feel as guilty as if you'd slapped a puppy or stepped on an insect.

"He means well," I said, in a large-hearted moment. Or maybe it was just the Scotch. "It's probably just that he feels insecure. He bolsters his own ego by attempting to tear down everybody else's."

"There you go!" Ed said. "What are you

defending him for? You and your diseased imagination!"

"For Pete's sake," I said. "Can't you forget that crack? It didn't really bother me any."

"Well, *I* didn't like it," Ed said. "I think you're a *good* writer!"

It was nice of him to say so. Of course he was slightly "high" by that time, but I warmed to him in spite of myself.

"Well, anyway," Marie said. "All this is neither here nor there. What are we going to tell Greg?"

Ed waved his highball carelessly. "Oh, tell him we did bring a girl for him. With his imagination, he'll have no trouble at all seeing her." He started to take a drink, then seemed to hear the echo of his own words. He lowered his glass to stare at us owlishly over its rim. "By golly!" he said. "Now there's an idea! Now wait a minute. Hold everything. Just let everybody please keep their shirt on a minute while I give this a little thought."

We all groaned, suspecting that Ed was off on another one of his practical jokes.

HE LOOKED around the room, his eyes gleaming impishly. "See that love-seat over there? That red one? Well, for the duration of the party, don't anybody dare to sit in the left-hand seat of it as you face it."

We all stared at it. "Why not?"

"Because Greg's girl is sitting there, that's why not."

Alice caught on first. "Now, Ed, don't be silly. Greg'll never swallow a yarn as ridiculous as that."

"Oh, won't he?" Ed scoffed. "Don't I know the guy? I tell you if we all act perfectly matter-of-fact about it, act as if the girl were really here and we really see her, Greg won't let himself be left out of things. Mark my words, he'll pretend that he sees her too. Isn't that the way he's always been in the past?"

He glared around at all of us, daring us to contradict him.

And of course we couldn't.

But I felt uncomfortable, just the same. I said, "Well, look. It's kind of a dirty trick to play on the guy, seems to me. All of us ganging up on him this way, like a bunch of cruel little kids."

Marie looked doubtful too.

But they all shouted us down, even Elaine. Somehow, Ed's idea had captured their imagination. What harm could it do, they asked us? It would be fun. And even Greg, if he were any kind of a good Joe at all, would laugh himself at the absurdity of it once he caught on to what we'd been doing. It would certainly drive the lesson home as nothing else could. Who knows, it might even humanize the lad, make him a really acceptable member of the gang?

"I'll teach that guy," Ed said, "to tell my pal, Al—good old Al!—that he has a diseased imagination!"

I still didn't like the idea, but they weren't paying any attention to me. They were all howling at various suggestions for names for the unknown lady. Hilarious cognomens were bruited back and forth Ed was all for calling her Passion Flower Houlihan or Rose of the Rancho Epstein, but I brought a halt to this.

I said, "If you must do it at all, at least don't be too raw. If you get too far-fetched, he'll never swallow any of it, and the thing will fall flat. Give her a name that sounds believable."

"Well, you name her," Ed suggested.

"Oh, call her Mary—May—Mabel," I said indifferently. "Mabel—uh—Hess."

It came to me from nowhere. Really it did. I mean I'm positive it was not a name I'd seen some place, rising now from my subconscious.

Ed lifted his drink, and bowed to the empty love-seat. "Miss Mabel Hess. *Je vous salute*!"

The bell ringing cut through our laughter.

"Sh-h-h! Here he comes. No giggling now, mind!"

GREG came in with that elaborate ease and studied poise that people assume who aren't very sure of their welcome.

Everybody gravely said hello, and I pressed a drink into his hand, and he stood there looking around. He tried to make

his darting glances seem idle ones, but we all knew the reason for them.

Our living room isn't very large, and he could certainly sweep it with a glance. But he couldn't get a clear view of the love-seat and whoever might be sitting upon it for the Johnsons and Joe Benning and Elaine were standing before it in a group.

Greg was standing with Ed and me. His manner was ingratiating, as it always was until he felt sure that he was "in," whereupon he inevitably waxed sardonic and patronizing.

"Well, where is she?" he asked. "I thought you were getting a date for me?"

I still didn't want to go through with it, but Ed waved his glass vaguely. "Over there. On the love-seat. And listen, Greg, try to like this one and be nice to her. She's a darned sweet kid, and personally I think she's too good for you."

It was said with exactly the right, light casual air.

The Johnsons had drifted over in time to hear the last of this, and they nodded enthusiastically. "So pretty! And such a lovely shy manner!"

Ed was nudging me. I said unwillingly, "Yes. Marie and I liked her at once. The Madonna type, I guess you'd call her."

Greg looked around wildly. It really was kind of funny, at that. "But where? Where is she?" he asked, all agog.

Edna Johnson waved. "Over there—oh! Joe and Elaine are standing right in the way. Joe! Elaine! Come here a second, will you?" As they came toward us, leaving the love-seat in clear view, Edna went on, "There now! Didn't we tell you?"

We all hung breathless on his answer. He was staring at the love-seat, then at us, then back to the love-seat again.

Surely he'd never be taken in by so patent an absurdity?

We waited.

You could have heard a pin drop.

Greg breathed softly.

"Oh, I see," he said at last. "I see her now." He whistled under his breath. "Say, where have you been keeping her? When I think of some of the plug-uglies you guys have pawned off on me in the past!"

It was hard not to laugh. Elaine opened her mouth, and I'm sure she would have spoiled everything by giggling had not Joe Benning bent forward swiftly and planted an expert kiss on her painted lips, successfully distracting her little mind for the nonce.

Greg really had fallen for the absurd plot, just as Ed had said he would.

There was a moment's silence while we all stood there, very dead-pan, watching Greg staring bewitched at the empty love-seat. Then he turned to me impatiently.

"Well," he said, ""what are we waiting for? I haven't even met her yet. How's about a knock-down?"

There was nothing else for it, so gravely I led him over to the love-seat, while the eyes of the others, I knew, were boring into our backs, and they smothered laughter behind their hands.

"Miss Hess. Mabel," I said to the empty air, feeling like a fool. "This is Greg Leyden."

He was smiling. "Hello, Miss Hess."

There wasn't any answer, of course.

But he sat down on the right-hand seat, and went on smoothly, "How does it happen we've never met before? You've never been at any of the other parties the crowd has given."

And he seemed to be listening to an answer.

EITHER he was terribly dumb, or he was quicker-witted than I would have given him credit for being. I suspected the latter. Shutting my jaw with a snap, I went back to the others. The faces of all of them were solemn, but their eyes were dancing with suppressed mischief, as they watched Greg carrying on an animated conversation with empty space.

Ed said to me, "You're a terrible host. You haven't even offered Miss Hess a drink. I'll give her one—good old Mabel!"

We tried not to watch too obviously as he went over to the love-seat carrying an extra highball. I had visions of the drink slopping all over our unpaid-for crimson damask love-seat as he'd try to offer a drink to a little lady who wasn't there.

But he was back in a moment, shaking his head, still bearing the glass in his hand. He said, "Greg says that Mabel doesn't care for anything, thank you."

"Oh, he calls her Mabel already, huh?" snickered Pinky Ahern. "He's a fast worker, that boy!"

The whole thing had fallen terribly flat for me. I went out to the kitchen for more ice cubes. Marie and Alice were already there, carving the ham and arranging the salads. Ed came trailing out after me.

"Didn't I tell you?" he whispered gleefully.

Marie said, "It gives me the shivers the way he sits there talking—just as if somebody were really there."

"I knew he'd fall for it," Ed said.

I was tired of the whole business. I said wearily, "Don't be goofy, Ed. Anybody could see what has happened."

"Well, what has happened?"

"How can you be so dumb? Greg caught on to the joke right away, of course. He hasn't got a hole in his head. He's turned the tables on us nicely by dumping the joke right back in our laps."

Ed thought that over. If he'd been entirely sober, he would have seen it for himself long before this.

Marie said, "I wouldn't have thought Greg could be so convincing an actor."

And Alice agreed, "He's really good. You'd swear the most fascinating girl in the world was holding him enthralled."

I shrugged. "Well, let's get back to the living room. When we're all together again, he'll call it off and we can have a good laugh all around. I've got to hand it to him, though. He's really given us one in the eye, this time. The biters bit."

Ed looked crestfallen.

Alice said severely, "And I hope this will be a lesson to you. You and your silly practical jokes."

But when we went back into the living room, Greg was still deep in animated converse. His right elbow was resting on the back of the seat, his head supported by his propped hand. He was smiling and laughing and talking eighteen to the dozen, and seemed to be having a very good time for himself, indeed. If I hadn't known what he was up to, it would have given me the willies, watching him smiling and nodding to himself, like some particularly mad inmate of Bedlam.

He didn't pay any of us the slightest attention. Apparently he was prepared to keep up the masquerade all night. And it was ruining the party.

Marie nudged me angrily. "For heaven's sake, go over there and tell him to cut it out. He doesn't know when to say when. The joke's on us, and it wasn't very funny to begin with—no more than any of Ed's so-called humorous ideas ever are. Go on, now! Before any more of the evening is spoiled."

I started obediently over to the love-seat and just as I reached it, Greg stood up. I thought he'd tired at last of his little game.

BUT I was wrong.

"Say, Al," he said, in a confidential tone. "Mabel is tired and wants to leave. I'm going with her. She says she only came because she was so lonesome, so hungry for the sound of voices and laughter." His spaniel eyes asked forgiveness for telling me this. "You won't mind, will you, if I take her away so early? We don't like to break up the party, but—"

I said, "Okay, Greg. You win. Cut it out. The joke's on us, and no harm done."

He looked at me blankly. "Joke?"

His persistence started to make me angry. Didn't he know when an anti-climax had been reached? I told him, I said, "Cut it out! You know as well as we do that there isn't any Mabel Hess!"

"Not any—?" He continued to look at me blankly. Then he turned to the side. Evidently his invisible companion had risen when he did, for he was looking at her face at eye level. Or, at least, he was trying to make me believe that he was. When he turned back to me again, the expression on his face was a peculiar mixture of sorrow and annoyance.

"Now, Al," he reproved me. "That wasn't a very nice thing for you to say. And right in front of Mabel, too. Look, you've made her cry!" The annoyance deepened to

anger, and he went on belligerently, "If you're trying to imply, Al, that Mabel is so insignificant, so colorless, so lacking in personality as to be entirely unnoticeable—well, you can't say that again without answering to me for it!"

It was ridiculous, but his anger was contagious. I had all I could do to restrain myself from swinging on him. What was he trying to put over on us, anyway?

He turned from me to look at the others, and his eyes no longer resembled a spaniel's. They were flashing and sparkling with righteous wrath.

"What's the matter with all you people tonight, anyway!" he excoriated us. "Except for Ed offering her a drink, not one of you tonight has paid the slightest attention whatever to Mabel, for all you were so highly complimentary about her when I came in! And she's your guest, too! Well, I call it a pretty low-down, scurvy trick, and lousy treatment to hand out to a delicate girl like her, who never did anything to any of you! I'm completely fed up! And if I never see you characters again, it will be too soon!" His face was rigid with fury, and only softened when he said, "Come on, Mabel. Let's get out of here!"

And they—I mean *he*, for the love of Mike! was gone while the rest of us were still standing there, our mouths opening and shutting like freshly-landed fish.

IT WAS Elaine who created a diversion. She promptly went off into galloping hysterics before falling into a dead faint. We had a terrible time reviving her.

"Is she conscious?" Marie asked at last.

"As conscious as she ever gets," Joe reassured her.

We helped Elaine to her feet. And we had time then to think of Greg Leyden and his furious diatribe.

"Brother!" Ed whistled. "Did he lay on the lash! Did we ever get our ears pinned back, though!"

"You've got to hand it to him," Marie said. "I almost believed for a minute that Mabel Hess was there."

"*Almost?*" Elaine shivered. "I think she *was* there!"

Elaine is dumb, I grant you. And of course she was exaggerating. But, do you know, sometimes I wonder if she could have a sixth sense, by way of compensation?

Well, the whole thing left a bad taste in our mouths. The next morning Marie and I debated the advisability of apologizing to Greg. We hadn't cared for the idea to begin with, and we were thoroughly ashamed of ourselves for not putting a stop to it when it had been first proposed by Ed.

"For, of course," Marie pointed out, "Greg was just carrying the thing through to a logical conclusion by persisting in pretending that Mabel Hess was there with him. It gave him a good opportunity to tell us off, and ram that joke right down our silly throats to the bitter end."

I heartily agreed with her.

Twice during that ensuing week I telephoned Greg's apartment to tell him we were sorry about it all, but there wasn't any answer. And then, one afternoon towards the end of the week, I ran into him as I was coming down the post office steps with a rejected manuscript in my hand.

For a minute I was afraid Greg was going to pass me without speaking—and I would scarcely have blamed him—but he looked at me, hesitated for a minute as if he were going to go on, then stopped.

"Hello, Al," he said uncertainly.

I was just as uncomfortable as he was. "I've phoned you twice this week, but you were never in. Come on over and have a cup of coffee with me. There's something I'd like to tell you."

But as it happened, Greg did most of the talking once we were settled in a booth in the doughnut-and-coffee shop across the street.

While I was still searching for words with which to apologize, he said, "I want to tell you how sorry I am, Al, that I lost my temper at the party last Saturday night."

I squirmed with embarrassment. He was apologizing to me, after everything, which was certainly heaping on the coals of fire.

"Well, gee!" I said, "You were justified. We handed you a pretty raw deal."

He looked surprised. "Oh, I didn't care

for myself. And anyway, I'm not blaming you, Al."

And then he said it.

He said, "Mabel says it wasn't your fault."

I stared at him, goggle-eyed. Why in hell should he persist in pretending to believe in the Mabel Hess myth? Or was he pretending? For the first time, the suspicion crossed my mind that Greg Leyden might be crazy.

He must have put the wrong interpretation on my astonishment, for he smiled. "Oh, yes. Mabel likes you, you know. She says you really have a very kind heart."

"Does—does she?" I asked idiotically. But what answer *could* I make to such an outlandish statement?

"Oh, yes," Greg assured me. "And of course I'll always be grateful to you for bringing us together."

I swallowed. The walls of the shop were spinning around me, like a carousel gone mad. "You—you mean you still see her?"

He looked away. I could see the slow red creeping up his face and neck above his white collar. He hesitated a minute, then seemed to come to some sort of a decision. He turned to look at me frankly.

"Listen, Al. I wasn't going to tell you at first, for fear you'd misunderstand. But, after all, you're a writer. Broadminded, tolerant. The gay Bohemian type."

I choked on my coffee. Where do people get these ideas? I thanked God that Marie wasn't there to hear him.

"The truth of the matter is—" Greg went on, his blush growing even deeper, "Well, Mabel is living with me."

He must have gone crazy! He might even become violent!

Again he misinterpreted my expression.

"No, no, no!" he said. "Nothing like that! Of course it's strictly platonic!" He looked at me reproachfully. "You know Mabel. How could you possibly think anything else?"

I'd humor him. I'd get away as quickly as I could.

I asked, "How did it happen?"

His eyes grew soft. He certainly had changed in the week since I had seen him last. For the first time, I found myself almost liking him.

He said proudly, "She *asked* me if she could. When we drove away from your party, and I offered to take her home, she said she had nowhere to go. Gee, Al! She was so fragile and wistful and kind of—oh, I don't know, pitiful! I couldn't say no. You see that, don't you? I—I didn't even *want* to say no. I'd fallen in love with her at sight."

He dreamed there a minute before he went on, low. "Of course, I thought there'd be a lot of talk about it, and I really didn't care, though I've always been pretty conventional, I guess. Even a stuffed-shirt, smug in my rectitude. But, you know, it's a funny thing.

"There's two old maids who live across the hall from me, and I thought their tongues would be wagging at both ends, once they saw Mabel and me entering and leaving my apartment together. But they *have* seen us, and they don't seem to think anything of it! I thought they'd cut me dead, but they always say hello, and smile."

He fidgeted with a fork, frowning. "Of course, it's true they ignore Mabel completely. They look right through her. It's almost as if they can't see her."

I wet my lips. "But—Mabel? Have you just accepted her? A homeless girl? Haven't you even asked her any questions about herself?"

Greg smiled shyly. "In the beginning, I did. But she was always—evasive. She won't tell me anything about herself. I kidded her about it. I called her my Lady of Mystery. But now I never ask any more. It seemed to make her so sad. I don't even want to know—whatever there is to know. Everything is so beautiful, just as it is. I wouldn't run the risk of spoiling it."

Now, *I'm* not crazy. *I* know how all this sounds. But you should have been there! You should have heard him! He wasn't insane, as I'd feared. I'd take a bet on it. He wasn't even drunk. *He*, at least, believed sincerely in the existence of Mabel Hess.

I couldn't take any more. I got up groggily. I mumbled something, and left

him abruptly. I knew he was staring after me, surprised, even upset by my sudden leave-taking.

But, take it from me, he was certainly not so upset as I was!

I WANTED to go home and lie down in a darkened room with a wet rag on my forehead. I wanted to hide in a closet. I wanted to get blind-drunk. I wanted to do anything but think about Greg Leyden.

I don't know what I wanted.

I certainly didn't expect what I got, though.

For when I reached home, my nerves fluttering like a flag in the wind, Marie was sitting on the very edge of a chair in the living room, staring expectantly at the door, waiting for me to come through it. She still had her hat on, and an early edition of the evening paper was folded on her lap.

"Well," she said grimly, when she saw me. "I hope you're satisfied now! We're moving out of here in the morning!"

I couldn't cope with a wife in that mood, not after what I'd just been through.

I said wearily, "What's eating you now?"

"Don't take that tone with me!" she said. She threw the paper indignantly across to me. "That's what's eating me! Read it!"

I regarded the printed page with a jaundiced eye, mumbled aloud, "STEEL MARKET DRIFTS LOWER—"

"No, no, no!" cried Marie impatiently. "Not that, idiot! The little paragraph buried way down at the bottom of the first column!"

I read aloud again, after I'd found what she meant. " 'The will of Miss Mabel Hess, who committed suicide last September by inhaling gas in the kitchen of her home at 1122 Pleasant Parkway, has been admitted to probate.' "

I read it again.

" 'Mabel Hess, 1122 Pleasant Parkway,' " I said. I looked at Marie. "Say, that's *this* house!"

Someone seemed to be trailing fingers dipped in ice-water up and down my spine.

I can't tell Greg. He'd say I have a diseased imagination.

But I can't help wondering who—or *what*—is sharing his apartment!

Incantation

BY PAGE COOPER

LORD of the unseen,
Of ghosts that howl through musty corners of the mind
And stir the hideous sightless fears that grope to find
A strangling clutch on this poor terror-palsied hand,
Oh keep them blind.

Lord of the unspoken,
Of viper words that suck the poisoned wounds of red
And festered old betrayals; e'er my lips have fed
Their venom to a heart as yet unstabbed, unbled,
Oh strike them dead.

Potts' Triumph

BY AUGUST DERLETH

Where there had been an air of mischievous interference, now there was a disturbing note of malignancy.

NO ONE of means in Winterton ever put up a house without having Philander Potts to "do" it for them. Philander Potts: Interior Decorator was the acme of perfection; he was the best judge of color combinations, wallpaper patterns, wood finishes, and all those little gewgaws and gimcracks which send silly women into raptures; his was the last and decisive word on hangings, *objets d'art*, and all manner of decorations, from

Heading by Vincent Napoli

the simple and effective to the ornate and garish, so comforting to those happily addled people who imagine that the presence of anything specious and glittering is proof positive of their advance in the world—material, spiritual, and intellectual.

Philander Potts, in a word, was the possessor of impeccable taste, and no false modesty forbade his admission of that fact. His was a hard-won success. He had started on a shoestring, but, being blessed with unmitigated gall and no scruples whatsoever, he had forced most of his competitors out of business, one by one, until finally he was the only interior decorator who had any standing at all in the city. He became a ruthless dictator in his business and a merciless martinet at home; his assistants, his secretary, his stenographer, his wife, and his two children all danced to his whistle, and while he was happy, they were not, but their happiness was not his problem.

No one could take away his glory. A house done by Potts was a success; it had to be, not only because there was no one in Winterton with sufficient taste and imagination to do or conceive of better, but because there was no gainsaying the fact. People in Winterton and its community area spoke of a "Potts house" as informed persons in the wider world spoke of a house by Frank Lloyd Wright or a theatre set by Jones or a portrait by Sargent. People were frankly proud to have their houses "done" by Potts, and Potts was proudest of all; indeed, in his more fanciful moments he conceived of the entire city of Winterton eventually done and redone by Potts, he dreamed of the distant day when people might speak of a "Potts city" as they now spoke of a "Potts house."

Ah, the vanity of men! Potts thought that he was being offered a beginning on his grandiose dream when the young, orphaned Laver sisters bought the long-abandoned Chitterton house, once, in the unlamented seventies, the grand house of Winterton. The young ladies called on Philander Potts without delay, and he received them, pomaded, perfumed, and elegant as always, despite his tendency to fat. The young ladies were eyecatching, one blonde and brown-eyed, the other brunette and blue-eyed.

"Dear ladies," he purred, "you have come about your new house. Or perhaps I ought to say the old house which will be as new when I finish with it."

"We shall certainly need your advice," admitted Janna, the blonde, with commendable caution.

"You see, Mr. Potts," interposed Edna, "we have a rather special problem. And to tell the truth, we don't know whether you are prepared to handle it."

Philander Potts drew himself as far up to his full height as his paunch would permit and scowled magnificently. "I have yet to encounter the problem I cannot surmount," he pontificated.

"It seems that we have a haunted room in the house," Edna went on, a faint frown appearing on her high forehead.

"Indeed," said Potts, raising his eyebrows sardonically.

"A drawing-room on the second floor resists any attempt to do anything for it," Edna continued.

Potts sat down, clasped his hands on his desk, and leaned forward with interest. "Tell me about it," he urged.

BETWEEN them, the Laver sisters summarized their experiences with the drawing-room on the second floor. It was a large, handsomely-appointed room—handsome, that is, by the standards of 1870—with a fine view over the city, for the house stood on a knoll overlooking most of Winterton. Since it adjoined a bedroom and a bath, it was ideal for the use of one of the sisters or of house-guests. It had been the favorite room of the last surviving Chittertons—Miss Lavinia and Miss Hester, strange, introverted women, reclusive and completely withdrawn from any social life whatever. They had permitted no change in the room within their lifetime, and quite evidently they meant to permit no change now that they had passed over.

The Chittertons obviously haunted the

room. Each time a chair was moved so much as a foot, it was found back in its former position within a short time thereafter, though no human hand had moved it. One day the Laver sisters and their hired help had completely rearranged the old furniture, pending arrival of the new; they had finished this laborious task in one afternoon. Yet, by morning, accompanied in the night by a tremendous banging and clattering, all the furniture was back in place as the Chittertons had had it and quite patently still wanted it.

The Laver sisters wanted it understood that for their part they were not afraid of ghosts or any other manifestation of the supernatural, but they meant to have the haunted room redone. Would Potts do it?

"I shall make a masterpiece of it," he assured them. "Jennings and Martin will be out in the morning."

"Price is no object," said Edna, rising.

Philander Potts heartily endorsed and respected this attitude; it made him almost unctuous and doubled his natural veneer of solicitude; he showed the Laver sisters to the outer door in person.

PROMPTLY in the morning Potts' assistants showed up at the Chitterton house. Their arrival coincided with the coming of the new furniture ordered for the second-floor drawing-room. Thus it was fortuitous. They lost no time in removing all the Chitterton furniture and carting it away, replacing it with the new pieces which the Lavers had bought in Cleveland.

After lunch, Philander Potts himself appeared on the scene. He found his assistants much harassed.

"What have you done?" he asked bluntly.

"Just about nothing but move furniture," said Jennings, the older man.

"You've had all morning," growled Potts in his nastiest voice.

"We'll need more mornings," said Martin.

Potts looked critically around him. "Impossible" he exclaimed at last. "The arrangement is dated and inappropriate. It might have been done sixty years ago—not now."

"We didn't make it," chorused his assistants indignantly.

Each of them made an attempt to explain before Potts signalled Jennings to speak. Then Jennings set forth a detailed account of their activities of the morning—the moving of the furniture, the selection of a color for carpeting, the discussion with the sisters on wallpaper, since the horrible imported French paper, stained and aged as it was, must go, and finally the descent to lunch, during which hour the furniture had been mysteriously shifted around to its present pattern.

This was, incidentally, the same pattern which the old furniture had outlined; whoever it was that was carrying on this annoying hanky-panky was at least being consistent; the new pieces had simply been substituted for the old; if some non-human agency were indeed responsible for the disturbances in the second-floor drawing-room, that agency had adjusted itself to the loss of the old pieces. Doubtless it would adjust as readily to other changes, the Laver sisters notwithstanding.

"Very well, carry on," said Potts. "Never mind about the furniture. Leave it where it is. Have they chosen carpeting?"

"Yes, sir. A fine claret broadloom."

"Wallpaper?"

"There seems to be some doubt."

"I'll take the sample book and talk to them."

Potts found the Laver sisters and sat down between them with the book of wallpaper samples. Since they had selected a claret carpeting, they would want something on their walls in claret with rust, copper, bronze, sienna, perhaps burnt umber. He believed he had just the thing. With a studied gesture he opened the sample book at just the page and revealed a new pattern of varicolored figures on a pale sienna background, a pattern of city streets, with miniature human beings walking about in all directions. It was a colorful but not flamboyant wallpaper.

"Oh, delightful!" exclaimed Janna.

"It's very new," confided Potts with the air of conveying a priceless secret. "I may say, there is not another like it in Winter-

ton. And, of course, if you decide to use it, there will not be another."

"Do you have it in stock?" asked Edna practically.

"In ample quantity, I assure you."

"Good. I like it."

"And I," agreed Janna.

"Let me compliment you on your exquisite taste, dear ladies," he murmured.

HE WENT back upstairs and instructed his assistants to paint the ceiling in pale yellow, pending the arrival of the wallpaper from the shop, and left the house eminently delighted at the sisters' selection of some of the most expensive material he had to offer. Once at the shop he ordered out sufficient paper to far more than cover the walls of the haunted drawing-room.

He may have had some vague premonition at that point.

His men reported the ceiling done, and one wall papered when they returned at six o'clock. At eight, the sisters were on the telephone to inform Philander Potts that all the wallpaper his men had put up had come down.

"Dear ladies, wallpaper by Potts does not come down," he replied, incredulous.

"Well, torn down, then."

"I see." He was pinked, irritated. That anyone should dare to interfere with a Potts house was inconceivable. It was a challenge that could not be ignored. "I will personally attend to the room tomorrow," he assured the sisters.

In the morning he arrived with his assistants. He was girded with righteous indignation and his customary ego, which was colossal. He surveyed the shambles in the drawing-room with wrath. Only the ceiling had not been touched. The trick, he saw, was to accomplish the act; the *fait accompli* evidently resisted reprisal, except for the arrangement of the furniture. However regrettable in its conservatism, the arrangement would probably have to remain, for the furniture was movable.

"The first thing to do is to get down all the old wallpaper," he decided.

Forthwith they began. Jennings and Martin watched him with ill-concealed interest. He could not fathom this at first, but very soon he understood. For as he worked on the wall, removing the old paper, he was conscious of an irritating kind of interference—as if drafts of air were rising out of nowhere to whip the paper up into his face, or spectral hands were seeking to prevent his work. That his assistants had experienced similar interference he did not doubt, but for his part, he intended to betray in no way that he was aware of it.

Nevertheless, it was extremely annoying and not a little upsetting. There was no manifest draft in the room; the windows were closed, the door likewise. There was no clear source of any current of air. Nor did he in fact feel air—all his observations were of the fluttering of the torn paper, quite as if the paper itself were animated, moving of its own volition with a singularly purposeful plan, as if to discourage him in his efforts to remove it.

But he would not be discouraged. He attacked the wall grimly, firmly, refusing to be delayed or distracted by the curiously animated paper, which shook its mustiness about him where he worked, so that in but a little time he wore a thin coating of dust. But by noon the walls were cleared and ready for the new wallpaper, and he descended to have luncheon with the Laver sisters at their invitation.

"This time," he said confidently, "the paper will stay—or my name isn't Philander Potts."

"But of course it is," answered Janna.

"Will you have coffee or tea, Mr. Potts?" asked Edna, and immediately went on to ask a further question. "You must have known the Chitterton sisters. What sort of women were they?

"Typical old maids," he replied.

"What is a typical old maid, Mr. Potts?" asked Janna naively.

He shrugged elaborately. "Well, cranky, obstinate, secluded. They certainly lived secluded lives, as you know. You found that out. Didn't like people. I suppose if you get to living by yourself long enough, you don't want to bother with people. After all, dear ladies, people are a problem." He said this as if it were a profound truth, though all

he meant to say, really, was that people who gave him trouble were a problem; he wondered as he spoke whether ghosts were people. He thought not.

"Difficult to get along with?" asked Edna.

"Extremely. Of course, my father knew them better than I did. They've been dead almost twenty years."

"Do you suppose ghosts age?" asked Janna naively.

"I never thought about it," said Potts bluntly. "I don't believe in ghosts."

"I see. *We* don't seem to have any alternative," answered Edna simply.

Potts was slightly disconcerted, but not much. Privately he thought that the Laver sisters had a tendency to obtuseness, but, since they were the source of his current income, he forebore to say so. He made polite conversation with them during the balance of the meal and then returned to the second floor drawing-room to put on the new wallpaper.

Everything was as he had left it. He caught himself admitting that he had expected changes. But even a ghost could hardly replace the old wallpaper, which had been taken out and burned just before Jenkins and Martin had gone to lunch. He set to work immediately, not waiting for his assistants to return, estimating that the papering of the room could be accomplished by evening.

IN A very short time he was aware of something more in the room's atmosphere. Where all morning there had been an air of almost mischievous interference, now there was a disturbing note of malignancy, an aura of it lay in the room almost tangible enough to touch. It pressed in at him from all sides, quickening his pulse and shooting him through with vague alarm which baffled and angered him.

Would Jennings and Martin notice it? He wondered.

They did. They returned at one and got promptly to work. In half an hour Jennings muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" asked Potts with asperity.

"I don't like it, that's what," said Jennings.

"Like what?"

"This room. There's something in it."

"There certainly is," agreed Potts. "The three of us."

"Something more," supplemented Martin unusual assurance.

"I see," said Potts. "Well, men, I want you to stand it as long as you can. If you can hold out until four o'clock, you can go, and I'll finish it myself."

The atmosphere of danger thickened. A kind of sentient menace clouded the atmosphere. Yet, strangely, there was no interference. The paper went up on one wall, then another; the room was half done. By four o'clock, when Jennings and Martin somewhat apologetically withdrew, approximately half a wall remained to be done, and Potts assured his assistants that he could manage it very well and be off by six o'clock.

Thereafter he worked diligently alone.

He was oppressed by the thick aura of angry menace all around him. Once or twice he fancied that the room had darkened. As he worked, shrugging away his impressions, he had a disquieting conviction that someone was watching him, and several times he could have sworn that someone stood just out of range of his vision, seen from the corner of his eyes, but he knew this for the result of eye-strain. Nevertheless, the illusion persisted; almost unconsciously, he increased the tempo of his work.

But the room was definitely darkening, with a tangible darkness that drew in from the walls like a cloud. He was thankful that he was almost done, for the menace of the room was profoundly upsetting.

Two strips left to put on.

One.

He turned to take it up and faced into the cloud of darkness spiralling about like a cone. For a moment he stood in amazement, staring. Then he closed his eyes and shook his head. Opening his eyes, he had a moment to see two grim-faced old ladies stepping out of that unworldly cloud of darkness and bearing down upon him with vengeful purpose.

In a second they had hold of him.

He shouted hoarsely, once.

"Did you hear something, Edna?" asked Janna, turning from the phonograph.

"Nothing unusual, why?"

"I thought I heard a shout."

"No, I think not. Play *Quatro Vidras* again, will you? Mr. Potts ought to be almost done."

"Did you ask him to dinner?"

"Heavens, no! What a bore!"

In half an hour they went up to the drawing-room on the second floor. Potts had gone, though his tools had been left to be picked up in the morning.

"What a lovely paper!" exclaimed Janna.

"And when the carpet and the furniture are placed, it will be one of our best. Really too good for guests," observed Edna.

"But I suppose tonight it'll all be ripped off again," said Janna sadly.

"Well, I should hope not. Mr. Potts will have to do it all over. He'll hate it, but he promised. We'll hold him to it."

Janna did not reply. She stood with her head cocked a little to one side, listening. After a few moments she asked, "Do you hear anything, Edna?"

"This house must be troubling you, dear," said Edna complacently. "What should I hear?"

"I thought—I just thought—a voice. But, of course, it couldn't be." She shook her head, as if to shake the sound away. "Oh, I do hope this paper won't be torn off in the night!"

But the paper was not torn off. Indeed, the assistants from the establishment of Philander Potts: Interior Decorator, were able on the following day, to set the room fully to rights, with the new carpeting and furniture and hangings, and, since they elected wisely to retain the old arrangement of the furniture, there was no further disturbance.

THE disappearance of Philander Potts, however, was a nine-day wonder until it was ascertained that a comely young widow had left town at approximately the same time, and, with that particular charity that is so integral in the human race, it was assumed, however erroneously, that Potts had suddenly decided to live up too his Christian name and had gone off with the widow.

Potts' wife and children were more relieved than otherwise. Messrs. Jennings and Martin managed the business very well without Philander Potts, and Potts' family, as well as his employees, began to live a far pleasanter life with no diminution of income. If anything, there was a substantial increase.

Philander Potts would have appreciated it, had he been in a position to do so, for it was as a result of his refurbishing of the haunted drawing-room that new and additional splendor came to the name of Potts.

The Laver sisters candidly called the room "Potts' triumph."

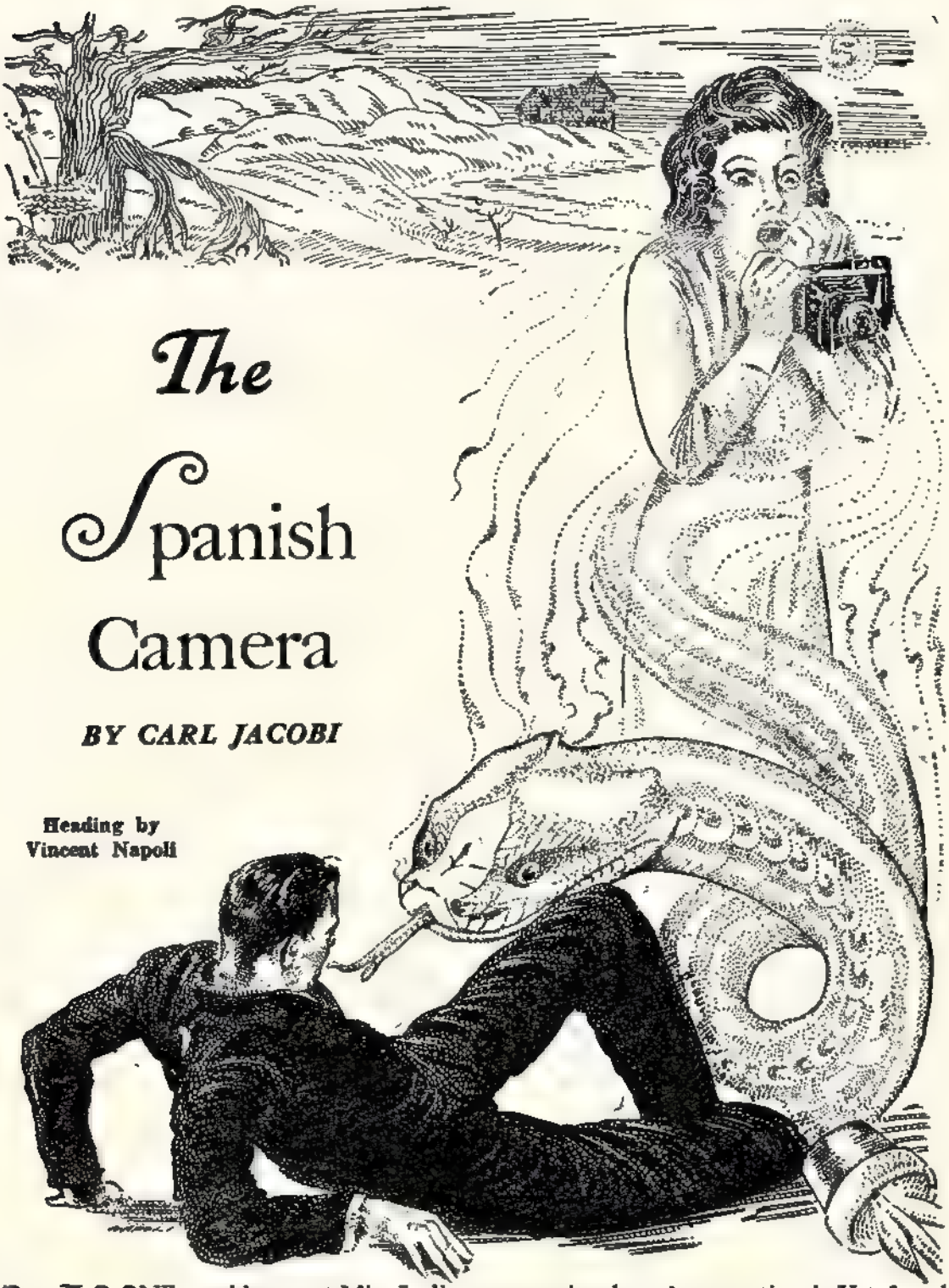
They were in the habit of showing visitors into the drawing-room with a kind of awe. "His secret has gone away with him," they were accustomed to say. "He promised us a masterpiece, and this is one, certainly. A wallpaper with sound effects, no less. Now, stand right here, and if you listen closely, it sounds just as if someone very far away were saying, *Let me out! Let me out!*"

Fortunately, no one ever thought to question the incongruousness of that tiny figure clad in some kind of working clothes so out of place in that final strip of wallpaper affixed with such determined vengefulness by hands which were certainly not those of Philander Potts. People were used to saying of him that Philander Potts put himself heart and soul into his work. And body, with a little outside help.

. . . . . *in the next* **WEIRD TALES** . . . . .

"The Third Shadow"—RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

Its lens was sensitive to vague horrors as well as concrete objects.



The Spanish Camera

BY CARL JACOBI

Heading by Vincent Napoli

NO ONE would suspect Miss Lydia Lancaster of being a dreamer. She was conservative to primness, unemotional, and conventional. Yet for all that, it was a habit of hers to daydream constantly during those off moments when

she was quite sure of being unobserved.

Miss Lydia worked as private secretary in the firm of Childers, Dourley and Ganston, 21 Maiden Lane. Her residence was in Bloomsbury by Russell Square, near the British Museum. And her life, the full thirty-three years of it up to the present, had been quite devoid of interest.

At five o'clock on Tuesday, the 5th of October, a dreary rain-swept day, Miss Lydia put away her typewriter, dusted her desk, as usual, and prepared to leave the office. At that moment a messenger arrived and delivered to her a letter from a well-known solicitor. The letter was brief and to the point:

> Dear Madam: I have to inform you that you have been named heir to certain monies and properties as stipulated in the will of the late George Faversham who died suddenly on Thursday last. Will you kindly call at this office at your earliest convenience.
>
> BENJAMIN HOWELL.

Miss Lydia had to read that note twice before it dawned on her who George Faversham was. He was her uncle, but her uncle in name only. That is to say, she had never met or even corresponded with him. The last of her mother's four brothers, he long had been regarded as the black sheep of the family. She knew he had never married and that he had spent the greater part of his life wandering about the back ports of the world. Two years in Nepal, through the Khyber Pass, up the Mahakam River in Dutch Borneo into unexplored Apo Kayan, into the white Indian country of the Upper Orinoco, he had come and gone like a will-o'-the-wisp. But why he should have bequeathed her anything or indeed remember that she even existed was more than she could conjecture.

Early next morning Miss Lydia called at the office of Benjamin Howell in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Howell, a somewhat younger man than she had expected, waited until she had settled herself in the chair opposite his desk. Then he opened a filing folder before him.

"Miss Lancaster," he said, "your uncle left you a small house in East Darwich, and the sum of fifty thousand pounds in cash or negotiable securities."

The significance of those words sank in slowly. Even at the end of five minutes after she had drunk the glass of water the solicitor gave her, she felt slightly dazed.

"Fifty thousand pounds!" she repeated. "Why, it's incredible! I'm—I'm rich!"

Mr. Howell nodded quietly. "The sum should take care of your needs for some time," he said dryly. "Now about the house in East Darwich. I should strongly advise disposing of it."

"Why?" asked Miss Lydia. "Is it run down?"

"Oh, it's in good enough repair. In fact, it's quite attractive. But . . ."

"But what . . .?"

"Well, your uncle was a strange person, Miss Lancaster. He visited some rather off-the-trail places. There may be some things about the house, or rather, in it, that . . ." His voice broke off significantly.

But Miss Lydia was adamant. Inasmuch as George Faversham had been good enough to leave her this money, the least she could do was accept the lesser part of his bequest. Besides, she was independent now, it would no longer be necessary for her to work or live in London, and a country house was the very thing she needed.

"Very well," sighed Mr. Howell, "I've done my part. Here are the keys: the brass one for the front door, the iron one for the back door and two small keys for some chests you'll find in the house. According to the will, my instructions were that these chests were not to be touched or opened by anyone but you."

IT WAS characteristic of Miss Lydia that she completed arrangements for her new life by the following Friday. Saturday she took the train to East Darwich, arriving early in the afternoon. As Mr. Howell had explained, the house was small and furnished in typical bachelor style. It was situated very close to the ocean shore and was quite alone, yet it appeared to be neither damp nor particularly isolated. The

view from the parlor window was breathtaking with the craggy cliffs on one side and the foam-swept beach on the other.

Miss Lydia had all but forgotten the chests mentioned by Mr. Howell until she came upon them in the bedroom. Then curiosity seized her and she hastened to fit the keys into the locks.

The covers thrown back, she stared in disappointment. In Miss Lydia's eyes they contained nothing of interest whatever. Photographic equipment: three cameras of different styles and manufacture, an enlarging device, a developing tank and a quantity of the necessary papers, films and chemicals.

She remembered her mother mentioning that photography had been George Faversham's stock-in-trade. During his earlier years he was employed by a large newspaper service. But more recently he had preferred to free lance, taking and selling pictures of unusual events as he came upon them.

She closed the two chests, pushed them back in a corner and promptly forgot about them. In the days that followed, Miss Lydia attempted to live the life of a gentlewoman of ease. She employed several female servants as well as a gardener and she completely refurbished the house in a manner to her own taste. She called on the vicar. She took long walks through the countryside—but after years of activity and routine this state of affairs soon began to pall on her, and she cast about for some other means of capturing her interest.

It was thus that she thought again of the two chests. Why not photography as a hobby? She had all the materials she needed, and the picturesque shore and the town of East Darwich should offer many opportunities for a camera fan.

From the chests she selected the thirty-five millimeter camera, loaded it with film and strolled out along the beach.

Miss Lydia's ideas about picture taking were decidedly elementary, but she was familiar enough with cameras to know that this one was rather unusual. It was of Spanish manufacture with an F 3.5 Garcia color-corrected lens and a shutter speed up to a thousandth of a second. Just below the lens a small rectangle of silver had been fastened, the center of which was hollow and the outer surface covered and protected by a shield of glass. In this aperture could be seen a tiny black stone roughly carved in the shape of a coiled serpent. In the sunlight this stone glittered from a hundred different facets. The view finder, too, was rather odd. At times when she peered through it, Miss Lydia could see her subject clearly and distinctly. Again, an inner fog seemed to cloud the glass and the scene appeared hazy and indistinct as though viewed through water.

She took eighteen pictures that first day: of the shore, the sea and the streets of East Darwich. Then she set about to do her developing and printing.

SURPRISINGLY enough, all eighteen negatives turned out well. But it was not until she had enlarged and dried her prints and spread them out on a table that she was able to take stock of her day's work. Then she leaned back with a glow of satisfaction.

The Spanish camera was a marvel. Sixteen of the pictures were sharp and clear with no undue highlights or shadows. There was the seashore with its smooth trackless stretch of sand and dashing spray. There was the distant fishing vessel outlined against the driven cloud. And there were the quaint crooked streets of East Darwich snapped in the clean freshness of early morning. She turned to the two remaining pictures and examined them carefully. One was merely fogged from pointing the lens into the sun. But the other—A queer thrill passed through her as she stared down upon it.

It was a sea view, taken from the top of one of the lesser cliffs. Miss Lydia remembered that picture very well, for it had cost her a torn dress climbing up the spume-wet rocks. It should have showed only an empty expanse of Atlantic with several sea gulls perched on a black pinnacle in the foreground. But at that point in the picture where the sky met the water—roughly in a space the size of a postage stamp—there appeared to be the miniature figure of a man—a man sitting in a chair with what

looked to be a painted plate-glass window behind him. The whole thing was small with vague edges, yet the man's features—aquiline nose, bristly mustache, deep inset eyes—were sharp and clear. It gave the impression that one had pointed the lens of the camera through a curtain of gauze and caught a fleeting glimpse of a mirage in the sky.

"Double exposure," said Miss Lydia to herself; but even as the thought came, she realized that couldn't be the answer. For she had taken no inside shots and the surroundings about the man's figure were definitely those of an interior.

She examined the camera again. Next she got out a magnifying glass and studied the plate-glass window background behind the man. Minute printing was discernible across this window and under the glass she slowly made out the words:

CAFE CLENARO

Her excitement mounted. There was no Cafe Clenaro in East Darwich. Of that she was positive. There was, however, a restaurant by that name in Poland Street, Soho, in London.

Miss Lydia went thoughtfully to bed. A hundred questions surged through her mind. Why should a camera which she herself had loaded with fresh film take a double exposure picture of an interior scene in London, hundreds of miles away. There seemed no answer, and she passed into a restless sleep. Toward morning she began to dream—queer fantastic dreams. She saw herself perched on a high tower with an enormous camera strapped about her body, and every time she pressed the shutter release, a huge serpent emerged from the lens chamber to glide about her in an endless circle.

Morning and she woke nervous and exhausted. A single thought was uppermost in her mind. She must go to London, to the Cafe Clenaro. She must wait for the man by the window, take his picture and compare that picture with the one on the table. For in her state of excitement, it somehow never occurred to her that the man might not come to the cafe or that he might not exist at all.

It was only when she was settled back in her seat on the train with the sunlit woods and fields gliding by that the utter absurdity of her action struck her. At King's Cross she took a cab out Euston, down Totenham Court Road and along Oxford to Poland Street and the Cafe Clenaro where she chose a table near the window and ordered lunch. Her camera in its case still hung by a strap from her shoulder, and her hands trembled slightly from a nervous expectancy.

Time passed, customers came and went, and Miss Lydia saw no sign of her man of the photograph. At length weariness stole over her; she paid her check and rose. Then suddenly she stiffened.

He was there, sitting in the chair by the window: a large, heavy-set man with a coffee-colored mustache and wearing singularly incongruous pince-nez spectacles. Sunlight streaming in the large window cast him in sharp relief. As in a dream Miss Lydia reached for her camera. She unbuckled the leather flap and raised the view finder to her eye. An instant of focus and she clicked the shutter. And then an astounding thing happened.

The man leaped upward with a hoarse cry and tore at his throat. His eyes bulged, his face purpled, the veins of his neck stood out lividly. A moment later it was all over. While Miss Lydia stood there transfixed, the man slumped to the floor, twitched a few times and lay still.

A crowd gathered like magic, and in the ensuing confusion Miss Lydia sidled quietly to the door and made her escape. Outside, she walked the streets for half an hour before her heart quieted and she regained some of her composure. But even then with the reality of afternoon traffic about her, she felt weak and dazed, like a person who had just been rescued from an onrushing train.

SHE hailed a cab and rode to the offices of Benjamin Howell. The solicitor ushered her into his office with some concern.

"In heaven's name, what's wrong?" he demanded. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I believe I have," sighed Miss Lydia. "At least, I've seen a murder without apparent cause."

"Murder!"

In halting sentences she told him all that had happened. When she had finished Mr. Howell sat there, scowling.

"I think you're seeing too much in coincidence," he said. "A heart attack or a hundred other things might have caused the man's death, if he did die; however, let's take a look at that camera."

HE DID look, long and carefully. Finally he returned it to its case and handed it back.

"Unusual, but I see nothing wrong with it," he said. "I can assure you it's not a weapon of any kind. Now, may I suggest again that you sell or dispose of that house and all that's in it."

"But you said—"

"Miss Lancaster," said Mr. Howell, "you never knew your uncle. I did. Believe me when I say he was an extraordinary man. As you know, he spent the greater part of his life, photographing rare and unusual scenes. He—ah, have you ever heard of the *Trinidad Queen*?"

She shook her head. "I don't believe so."

The solicitor leaned back, closing his eyes.

"The *Trinidad Queen* was a blackbirder, an eighteenth century slave-trade vessel, plying between Africa's west coast and the West Indies. In 1784 she left Martinique, ran into a storm, was blown off her course and foundered near the island of French Key in the Grenadines. Now her approximate position was thought to have been known for a long time and also known was the fact that her strong box contained nearly two hundred thousand gold guineas. There have been innumerable attempts to rescue that gold, but the position was in deep water, exposed to the winds, and all such attempts failed."

Howell paused to tilt back in his chair and make steeples of his hands.

"In his travels, your uncle, George Faversham, came on a map purporting to show that the *Trinidad Queen* had actually gone down some miles to the east off Rojo Bank and was lodged on a comparatively shallow reef. He organized a party, hired a small motor cruiser and headed for the Grenadines. That was a year ago."

Howell opened the desk humidor and took out a cigar. Halfway to lighting it, he changed his mind and returned it to the box.

"Primarily, of course, your uncle's motive in the whole affair was photography. He saw in the underwater action, the movements of the divers about the old sunken vessel an opportunity to capture on film some dramatic scenes. He took three men with him: Garcia Perena, a Portuguese from Havana, Dane Kellogg, a non-practicing British physician, and Justis Hardesty, a nondescript American whom he found on the San Juan waterfront. It was agreed that your uncle should have all returns on the photography work while the treasure, if any were found, should be divided four ways—"

"But what has all this to do with—?" Miss Lydia interrupted.

"With your camera? It may have nothing to do with it," replied Howell, "and then again it may have everything. First of all, you should know that the *Trinidad Queen* sailed under a stigma that has continued down through these many years. It was said that on the West African coast her skipper went upriver to a native village and took from a crude altar a small particle of what was known as the Damballah serpent stone. All the black evil which surrounded its obeah worship there in the jungle was said to have followed the captain and his ship."

HOWELL uncrossed his legs and shifted in his chair. "That's about all," he said, "except that your uncle eventually realized a part of his fortune from that expedition. He found the *Trinidad Queen* all right and he brought to the surface quite a large quantity of the gold. He also seems to have brought up that much discussed piece of the Damballah stone—that is my guess anyway as nature of that thing under the glass covering on your camera. But something happened on that expedition, something strange that drifted back to civilization only in the form of vague rumors.

It was said your uncle very nearly lost his life on one of the underwater dives."

Miss Lydia failed to see any connection between Mr. Howell's story and the subject in hand, but she was too polite to say so. The solicitor urged her again to dispose of her newly acquired house, and a few minutes later, still nervous and unsatisfied, she took her departure.

Morning found her back in East Darwich, anxiously scanning the morning paper. Any doubt she might have had that the man of the restaurant was not dead was dispelled when she read the following:

DANE KELLOGG DIES UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES IN SOHO CAFE.

Kellogg! That was the name Mr. Howell had given as one of the three men who had accompanied her uncle on his expedition!

For a week Miss Lydia lived a life of tension and anticipation. The papers continued with a few more desultory accounts of the strange death; then the story died out. More than once during that week she half decided to return to London and tell all she knew to the police. But a moment's consideration changed her mind. After all, she had done nothing that would interest Scotland Yard.

As time passed, however, she found herself thinking less about the man and more about her future work in photography. While in London she had picked up a pamphlet announcing a new prize contest in camera craft, and with typical amateur enthusiasm she cast about for worthy subject material.

Her strange dreams during this period continued, and strangely enough it was one of these dreams that formed into an idea for a picture. She dreamed she was walking along the beach in the moonlight and all about her were middle-aged men pleading with her to take their pictures, but every time she focused her camera and clicked the shutter the surrounding moonlight gave way to blackest night. When the moonlight returned again, the subject was writhing on the ground, desperately fighting a huge serpent.

The more Miss Lydia thought about this dream, the more it seemed to her that a moonlight shot of the ocean shore might be an ideal entry for the photography contest.

She chose her setting with extreme care. A hundred yards down the shore from her house, half buried in the sand, was the rotting skeleton of an old whale boat. In the background the wall of black cliffs formed a natural archway with the sand piled high in curious shaped dunes about it.

Loading the camera with a high speed film, Miss Lydia took along a collapsible tripod and went out on the shore one night shortly after darkness had set in. The sky, lit by brilliant stars, was shot here and there with flying spindrifts of cloud, but the moon had not yet arisen. Waiting for it, she sat on an outcropping rock and felt a vague uneasiness steal over her. At length the moon peered whitely over the tops of the trees and the rolling surf changed on the instant to silver.

Miss Lydia mounted the Spanish camera firmly on the tripod, focused it so the whale boat would be in upper mid-center of the picture and opened the lens to its full F. 3.5. She clicked open the shutter and waited, watching the minute hand of her wrist watch.

She took several pictures. Back in her house, she set about developing and printing. As she worked, a queer feeling that she was being watched by unseen eyes seized her. Nervously she caught herself looking over her shoulder several times.

Only two of the negatives proved suitable for printing. One of these was fairly successful, but the effect was rather that of a dull daylight shot. It was the second picture which drew her up short.

Double exposure again! The sandy strip of beach was very clear with the mellow moonlight caught perfectly. But the old whale boat was not there! In its place were the head and shoulders of a man—a Latin looking man this time, with dark features and a receding hair line. He was leaning against the front of a building, and Miss Lydia recognized that building as she studied it with her magnifying glass. It was the Drury Lane Theater.

Miss Lydia did not sleep well that night. She awoke at fitful intervals, the last time at three-thirty a.m. by the radium-faced clock on her dresser. The house was quite still, save for the distant swish and boom of the surf. Yet this time she was positive some unusual sound had awakened her. She got up, put on a dressing gown and slippers and made her way to the front door.

The moon had gone down, and the night was steeped in shadows, with only the glow of the stars. But as she stood there, the chill wind clutching at her gown, Miss Lydia suddenly stiffened. Ahead of her one of the shadows had detached itself from the others and was slowly advancing toward her. It was the figure of a man who seemed to glide rather than walk across the lawn. The lower part of his body was wreathed in mist, but to the woman in the doorway it seemed his face was clear and distinct, it was the face of a middle-aged man with mental strength and determination. Under one arm he carried a camera and in the other hand a book.

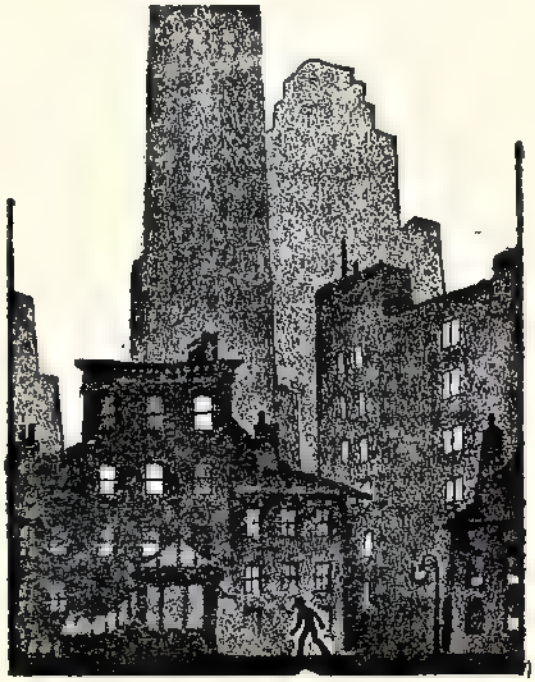
Coming to a halt in the open space before the door of the house, he suddenly poised the camera at some unseen object. Then he passed on to the far end of the veranda, took the book from under his arm and proceeded to wedge it between the ornamental porch rails. After which he turned and glided toward that point where the lawn merged into the sand of the beach. And there the mist seemed to gather about him in loose flowing coils until he had disappeared.

Was she dreaming? Miss Lydia rubbed her eyes and stared before her in sleepy bewilderment. She went back into her bedroom and returned with a powerful flashlight. But although she probed the white beam from the birches on one side to the azaelea bed on the other, she saw nothing.

Morning, and she was half way through her solitary breakfast before she suddenly remembered the book. That at least would prove whether her experience of the night was an actuality. Hurrying out onto the veranda, she stopped stunned. A book was there, still wedged between the porch rails, still damp from morning dew.

Miss Lydia stepped forward, took the book and glanced at its title. It was a well worn copy of *West Indian Journal*, by Panson McBeal, published in London in 1897, and, after a quick glance Miss Lydia thought it queer that anyone would read such a book. It was out of date both in style and subject matter, containing only one yellowed map. But a glance at the map told her that this book was undoubtedly the source of her uncle George Favershar's information as to the actual location of the *Trinidad Queen*. The actual site of the ship on French Key was carefully marked, together with the depth soundings.

One thing about the map puzzled her. On the margin at the bottom, in tiny hurried script was written *twenty-seven*. Why should anyone in the apparent haste that this writer was take the time to write those words instead of the numerals 27? Miss Lydia turned to page 27, but there was nothing unusual about it. Then words spoken by Solicitor Howell came back to her: "Your uncle was a strange man, Miss Lancaster. He did things in unusual ways." Was there a clue to his life, to the mystery of his camera in those two words written at the bottom of the map page?



She began looking on pages that were divisible by 27, without result. Then she looked simply at those pages in which 27 was a component part. She got no place here either.

ABRUPTLY she paused and began to count the letters in those two words. Counting the hyphen, they totaled twelve. She wrote down the numeral, 12, and looked at it abstractedly with the long habit of one who appreciates numbers for what they are. During the summer of '43, Miss Lydia had worked in the cryptograph department of British Intelligence, and now, without thinking, she applied her training here. She added the two digits of 12, making three; she added a 4 for the division of 12 by 3 and then swiftly multiplied the 34 by 12 and to this 108 she subtracted the total of 34 plus 12 or 46, leaving 62. All the while she was quite aware that her actions would seem meaningless to the casual observer.

Turning to the book again, she looked on page 62, sixth line down, second word in. The word she found there—"they"—didn't mean much. But when she had followed it with words in the identical position on every subsequent page with a six or a two in it, she stared astounded at her written result.

As Solicitor Benjamin Howell had told her, three men had accompanied her uncle on his trip to the *Trinidad Queen*, the foundered slave-trade vessel: Dane Kellogg, Justis Hardesty and Garcia Perena. The message which she had extracted from the West Indies travel book was a black condemnation of those three men. Briefly it told of George Faversham's overhearing the three plot to murder him. Murder for his share of the salvaged gold!

Miss Lydia closed the book thoughtfully. Why had George Faversham taken such pains to hide his message in the pages of that book? Simply because he was queer and eccentric? That might be one reason. But undoubtedly it was because at the time of the writing he was afraid one of the three —Hardesty, Kellogg, or Garcia Perena—would discover that he knew the truth. But if such an attempt against his life were plotted, why had her uncle not made any attempt to prosecute the three after his return to civilization? Howell had told her the answer. The men, fearing retaliation, had disappeared.

For two days Miss Lydia sought to forget these facts and lose herself in the routine duties of her house. The moonlight photograph with its fantastic inset of the man standing before Drury Theater entrance haunted her. On the third day she could stand it no longer. Salving her conscience with a list of things she needed in London, she caught the morning train. She took her camera along.

That night found her stumbling back into her house, dazed and haggard. Her eyes were bloodshot. She went directly to her bedroom and lay down in the darkness while a thousand mad thoughts swirled through her brain.

The camera had repeated itself. In London she had gone directly to Drury Lane Theater at Drury Lane and Catherine Street, and focused her gaze on that section of the theater entrance which had found itself in her photograph. Within half an hour it had happened.

A man with Latin features and impeccably dressed had paused in her ellipse of stage to light a cigarette. An instant Miss Lydia stared at him. Then her arm shot sideward of its own accord, opened the leather case of her camera and jerked the instrument to eye focus. "No!" she told herself. "I must not! I must not!" But a will other than her own ruled her every move. Through the view finder she saw the man standing there. She clicked the shutter.

In her room now, Miss Lydia tried to expel the scene from her thoughts. The man had died there, died horribly, but drawn by the same inner hypnosis she had lingered while the crowd gathered and a phlegmatic bobby made his identification. The man was Garcia Perena, a citizen of Havana!

Out of her confused mind, as she lay there in the darkness, a single thought rose to repeat itself over and over again. The camera with its accursed Damballah stone must

be destroyed, must be sent back to the depths from which it came.

Miss Lydia got out of bed, took up the camera and went out of the house. She went down the gravel path past the bed of azaleas and onto the moonlit beach. The booming surf seemed to resound in tune with her steps and the night wind caught her hair and skirts and whipped them out behind. She was heading for the Needle, a small promontory that stabbed out into deep water. There she could throw her camera away forever without any fear that it would be washed up on the beach.

The moon was brilliant and she seemed able to see for miles in the cold light. Half way to the Needle she suddenly halted. A man was approaching her from far down the beach. As yet he had not seen her, for she was moving in the shadow of the flanking cliff. For some reason stealth appeared to be in his movements, and Miss Lydia darted behind a boulder to let him pass. The man passed her and went on, walking with a slight limp in his right foot. She waited a moment, then began to follow.

He passed through her garden to the rear wall of her house and began to fumble with the fastenings of the window there. The window slid open, and the man gripped the sill preparatory to lifting himself through the opening. And as she stood there watching in the shadows, a feeling of something evil swept over Miss Lydia. Her camera was trembling like a thing alive in its case hanging from her shoulder. Abruptly it seemed to lift of its own accord into her hands. A cry of horror rose to her lips at the realization of what was happening.

With a jerk the man spun around, staring.

And calmly, and matter of factly, moved by another will, Miss Lydia lifted her camera to focus and clicked the shutter. A span of mist appeared to radiate outward from the lens. That mist seemed to open like a white envelope, from the depths of which the coils of a yellow green serpent emerged.

The serpent slid slowly forward, and the man at the window stared in fascinated horror. He threw himself sideways, attempted to leap over a collection of flower pots. He tripped and fell. And while his screams rent the night air, the serpent slid slowly over him and began to gather its coils about his throat.

MR. BENJAMIN HOWELL visited Miss Lydia the day after the inquest. He found his client in surprisingly good spirits, a little nervous from the ordeal of answering police questions but seemingly relieved that the jury had found a verdict of "death at the hands of person or persons unknown."

"But who was he?" Mr. Howell asked. "Your letter said something about a thief trying to break into your—"

"He was just that," replied Miss Lydia calmly. "But in addition his name was Justis Hardesty who you will remember was the third and last of the men who accompanied my uncle on the *Trinidad Queen*."

"But I don't understand," began Mr. Howell.

"The three of them—Hardesty, Kellogg and Garcia Perena — were fiends, cold-blooded fiends," continued Miss Lydia. "They deliberately plotted to murder my uncle, to sever his life-line and air hose while he was under water on the deck of the sunken vessel. Now all three of them are dead, and my uncle can rest in peace."

Howell half smiled. "Oh come, Miss Lancaster, you can't really believe George Faversham had anything to do with the death of those three men. It was pure coincidence that two of them died when they did. As for Hardesty, he simply read in the paper of your inheriting your uncle's fortune and saw in your house a good place to rob. As for that camera—by the way what did you do with the camera, Miss Lancaster?"

"It's gone," she said.

"Gone?"

Miss Lydia nodded cryptically and left the matter at that.

The Three Pools and the Painted Moon

BY FRANK OWEN

Heading by Boris Dolgov

His four souls had been willing to set out on their preordained destinations.

THE porcelains of Tang Ling were famous throughout all China. It has been written that he was a porcelain magician, and with good reason. Even

the Emperor had honored him and called him Elder Brother. Usually artists executed one phase only in the making of porcelain. One shaped a vase, another fired it. Some were specialists in glazes, others painted butterflies. The painter of moons was not nearly as famous as the painters of clouds or mountains. But Tang Ling did all these things with equal facility.

At times Tang Ling took weeks to perfect a single vase and during that time he conversed with no one, except for an occasional word with the old servant who brought him his rice. Though his possessions were considerable, while absorbed in creating he lived as frugally as a peasant. Tea was his one luxury, rare tea that had been grown high on a mountain where the Green Lady occasionally touched the growing leaves ever so gently with her long cold fingers.

Tang Ling assigned names to the vases he created. The title of the case that held an enduring place in his heart was "The Three Pools and the Painted Moon." He kept it on a teakwood table near the open window in his sleeping room. The vase was of sunflower yellow with the glow of the sun upon it even when there was no sun. Beside one of the clear cool pools of water stood a man and a girl. The man was richly attired in garments of green silk, emroidered with the Imperial Gold Dragon. The girl was like a lovely flower swaying in the breeze. Her fingers and lips were colored with the juice of balsam flowers. Her cheeks had been brushed with rice powder. Her hair, simply arranged, was black with tints of blue as the sun shone upon it. Her eyes were like unto black opals, with all their abundant mystery. But it was her smile that caught and held the attention, gentle, all-knowing and wonderfully sweet.

For hours each day, Tang Ling gazed on her enraptured; and when he slept, she invaded his dreams. For him she possessed a warmth of affection. How he longed to take her into his arms. No thought had he that she was but the figment of his own imagination, a fragile, exquisite porcelain lady. So enraptured was he, he seldom left the room that was glorified by the sparkle of her eyes, the slender grace of her body. He longed to be ever at her side, to be her devoted companion for days without end. And as he sipped the tea which his servant set down before him, he gazed into her eyes, and she gazed back at him. Her expression was enigmatic. Was it only his imagination or did she desire him also? Then suddenly a solution came to him, a solution so simple he marveled that he had not thought of it before. He would paint himself into the vase, standing beside her. And happiness would indeed be theirs.

He spent days mixing and grinding new colors for this supreme effort of his career. Using antimony as a base he manufactured common black, mirror black and also a wide variety of shades of purest yellow like unto the yolk of an egg, eel skin yellow, straw-color, canary, citron or lemon yellow, mustard, orange and sulphur. Then he mixed luxurious greens—snakeskin, cucumber, emerald, céladon or sea green. His blues were famed wherever artists congregated—powder-blue, sapphire, turquoise, peacock, kingfisher and blue like the sky at morning after rain. From copper he evolved crimson, peachbloom, crushed strawberries. From iron, vermilion, coral, tomato. From gold, rose, pink and ruby. He slashed his finger with a small knife and mixed his blood with the cupric oxide that is copper red.

The actual painting of himself into the beloved vase began on a morning at sunrise when the dew was heavy on the cool grass and the last vestige of moonlight still lingered in the tall bamboo. The perfume of flowers was attuned to the songs of gay plumaged birds, drunk with joy as they sang salutations to the dawn.

Tang Ling had bathed and dressed with extreme care as though this were the day of his wedding. He had purchased an Imperial Coronation robe that had once adorned a Ming Emperor. In the center was the Yang and the Yin, the male and the female principles, representing divine origin, embroidered in gold *couché* stitch on a plum-colored satin background. All the constellations from one to nine, representing the great social bows and mutual

duties were grouped around the *Tai-chi*. On the right shoulder was the imperial dragon enveloping the sacred disc; the moon, symbolizing the Yin. On the left shoulder was the Imperial dragon enveloping the sacred disc; the sun, symbolizing the Yang, the five lotus-purity; the eight phoenixes, the six *shou* characters—denoting long life. Wearing such a robe Tang Ling was indeed Emperor of Porcelain, the Son of Heaven. In such raiment would he paint his own portrait on the vase.

AND so he set to work. If he could achieve his desire, the slender graceful girl would be his. That the object he had set for himself could only be accomplished by alchemy and a large measure of magic was of little purport. Had not the great Wu Tao-tzu in the golden age of Tang painted with such skill that scores of legends have grown up about him. His dragons were enveloped in mist. It has been written that he painted horses with such realism that they ran away and were never seen again. His flowers were so lifelike their essence sweetened the room in which the pictures of them were hung. He painted on silk, on bamboo slips and on the walls of the Imperial Palace of the Emperor Ming Huang. The paintings of Wu Tao-tzu were three dimensional.

Tang Ling, on porcelain, had solved this three dimensional quality of Wu. His figures lived and breathed and appeared about to speak. No doubt had he that the slim, flowerlike girl he had painted with his own magic brush was a living pulsating being. Her exquisite tender smile was for him only. Her eyes followed him about the room.

He could hardly wait for that glorious moment when he could join her on the vase. As he painted himsef into the vase fingers fairly flew with inspiration. Glad was he that he had a strong wrist. Not for a moment did he pause to rest, nor did he partake of food or drink. He finished his own portrait by moonlight. Then he carried the precious vase down to the baking ovens at the foot of the garden. Gently he consigned the beloved vase to a second firing so that his figure might be imprisoned there forever.

That night was the strangest of his amazing career. Never had he endured such intense suffering and terror. His room was like a bake-oven, his bed the grate of a furnace. Perspiration fell from his body in scalding beads. Was it only his imagination or did it rise above him like live steam? While still alive he was being cremated. No Parsee placed on a burial tower while still living and being slowly devoured by ravenous vultures was subjected to more pain. He clutched at the silk coverlets of the kong and bit his teeth until the blood flowed. He endeavored with all his will power not to cry out but occasionally an anguished sob escaped him. Perhaps she was enduring torment equal to his! The thought stabbed him with such acute pain it even eclipsed, if that were possible, the fury of the intense oven-heat, for oven-heat it was. His bed had become as hot as the ovens at the foot of the garden. But all this intense suffering had to be. And somehow he survived it even as his countrymen for ages have endured every disaster—flood, starvation, pestilence and invasion, and through it all remained courteous, philosophic, serene as though they knew that inevitably all would be well once more.

AS THE first gaunt fingers of dawn reached through the open window of his sleeping room, Tang Ling rose wearily to his feet. Within a few hours he had become a dried up old man. He felt as if his flesh had been burned away and only bleached bones remained. Moaning slightly, he crept through the garden. He longed to hurry so that he might be free of this dreadful ordeal but speed was impossible. Though he fell twice, somehow he reached the baking-oven. With great effort he drew the beloved vase from it and placed it gently on the ground. Then he collapsed on the green earth and lay scarcely conscious while his body gradually cooled and some measure of relief came to him. How cool the dew felt on his fiery flesh.

Gradually the intense heat of his body lessened, and at last he slept. Every fibre

of his body knew complete exhaustion. He had stood at the threshold of the dwelling place of his ancestors, but it would have been precious relief had he stepped through and joined them. His four souls had been quite willing to set out on their preordained destinations. But now gentle sleep had come to him at last, sleep without dreams. Nearby in the small artificial lake, a white-plumed heron stood watching. It was late evening when he awakened. A thin sickle of moon lifted slantwise into the sky. A cool breeze stirred the treetops as it swept through the garden. The air was sweet with the breath of many flowers.

Tang Ling rose to his feet. His body felt light, empty with little more texture than a ghost. He was surprised that he could keep his feet on the ground. The breeze, cool and sweet, had intensified. He lifted his treasured vase in his arms. This was creation indeed for even by moonlight he could see that the girl was smiling and in her eyes, all-seeing, there was warm love and tenderness. He could discern her breathing, the rise and fall of her soft breast. And he knew that every beat of her heart was for him. Here was love beyond the reach of poets. With hushed footsteps, he walked back to his sleeping room. The feeling of fatigue remained with him. Merely to walk was a great effort as though old age enshrouded him. He clutched the vase to him for it was the most precious thing he possessed. Though that was wrong, too, for it seemed as if the vase possessed him more truly than he possessed the vase. It was a glowing creation of yellow madness.

BACK in his sleeping room, he placed the vase on a table near the open window where the sunlight could fall upon it. This was like painting a living rose, for it needed no sunlight, it glowed with an enchanting radiance of its own, a radiance that echoed the smile of his beloved. Now slender and fragile she looked, this little porcelain lady who from the tip of his brush out of a riot of color, had come to dwell in his heart. He was so intensely happy it was like physical pain. Still the feeling of languor remained. He lay back on the silken pillow of the kong. It was odd to gaze upon his own figure burnished on the vase, seeming far more alive than his living body. Perhaps this was his life's end. If so, what matter? His portrait on the vase would be immortal, nor would age wither the roundness and youth of his face. Gradually sleep assuaged his weariness, sleep deep and merciful.

Hours later, he awakened into a world of golden yellow splendor. He felt abundantly refreshed. Yet he had come unto a rich new world. Was he now an immortal? Was this the spiritual realms of his ancestors? If so, it was a beautiful awakening. He felt his thighs, his arms; his body was solid enough. Slowly he rose to his feet and gazed in awe about him. Nearby he noticed, as his eyes became attuned to the glowing yellow atmosphere, three pools of cool, clear water while above glowed a painted moon. Then he knew, for beside him stood the fragile girl. He dared not move, lest by doing so he might break the magic thread. And yet, in spite of himself, his arms encircled her and time stood still. Perhaps it had ceased to be when he painted his own figure on the case. Now he dwelt in a yellow porcelain land, without age, where it was forever spring. But, though he did not realize it at that moment, there was grave danger also, a personal danger of his own contriving.

AS HE held the girl to him, whose delicate beauty eclipsed the rarest cameo, he felt as though he were master of the universe. The stars were his and the moon also. He could hold morning in his hands. Alas, however, the extreme joy that engulfed him was but momentary, like a fragment of a poem by Li Po. The next instant he was fighting for his life, fighting a foe that existed only through his inspired brush strokes. But real or imagined his opponent fought with demoniac fury. It was all that Tang Ling could do to protect himself, nor had he any thought of being the aggressor. Even as he struggled, he regretted that he had painted this evil attacker with such an abundance of virility. His strength was amazing. Tang Ling was

losing the unequal battle. Fingers like talons were upon his throat, and he felt himself falling. Tighter the steel fingers closed on his throat as he was dragged into one of the three pools. Dimly through the water he could see the painted moon. So this was the end. Consciousness was slipping from him as there came an earth shattering crash!

When at last he opened his eyes, it was morning. The fragrance of the room was ethereal. The sunlight was liquid gold. He glanced toward the table on which stood the beloved vase. It was there no longer, but lay shattered on the floor. He bent down and examined the pieces. With enormous relish he discovered that his enemy's head had been severed from his body. A delectable manner in which to find him. But that was only a dream, a vivid dream, but a dream nonetheless. It was only then that he was aware that his head and shoulders were dripping wet. In astonishment he rose to his feet. And then she came to him through the curtained doorway, as slim and delicate as a flower. She nestled into his arms as though they had been made for that very purpose. It was a moment such as even gods might envy. Then together they walked out into an enchanted garden.

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The Insistent Ghost

By Emil Petaja

A ghostly figure rippled like so many phosphorescent sea worms on a glassy night ocean . . . .

Heading by Vincent Napoli

SEAGULLS, their bellies filled with herring spawn, halted their greedy peregrinations long enough to perch on Tessa Alder's faded sign, and not infrequently to add a brief comment to Tessa's corny but commercially sound device for luring tourists and townspeople into her little gift and book shop. Her beloved landlord would do nothing at all to relieve the peeled, dilapidated condition of the double-flat's facade (or indeed any other part of the house) so Tessa, with her usual delicate counterbalance of shrewd realism and affection for whimsy, painted the legend "YE OLDE GHOSTE SHOPPE" on an old piece of driftwood, and set it to swinging on the low brick wall in front of her window. Occasionally, when some young couple breathlessly asked her who haunted the shop and why, she would blandly improvise something appropriate.

Today, the sky having produced rain several times already, remained bleak and gusty and portentous. Inside the shop Tessa was giving her friend Verbena Smith tea.

"Artists sometimes take poison. Don't they, Verbena?" Tessa was asking, in her invariably mild sweet way.

As a matter of fact they had been discussing last night's movie, a lavish musical. Verbena Smith smoothed down her lavender ruffles and smiled uncertainly. She wished Tessa would not ramble so. People frequently asked her if Tessa Alder wasn't just a little off her head, and Verbena's no was not always as convincing as it might be. But she did enjoy taking tea with Tessa, and going to the movies with her. Then, too, Tessa was *old*—Tessa was sixty-seven, while she was only sixty-one.

"More tea, darling?" Tessa asked, when Verbena, in her old maid's brown study, neglected to answer her.

Verbena shook her head and sipped from her egg-shell cup significantly. Tessa hummed as she reached behind the little coal stove for her own special earthen pot and poured herself a third cup. Verbena coughed to conceal her smile. Tessa was so odd. She would serve herself from that ugly earthen pot behind the stove, whereas guests were served from the pretty China pot with the cosy on it, the jaunty red and yellow cosy Verbena herself had knitted Tessa for Christmas. Well, it was likely her way of indicating that her guests were better than she was. Verbena was willing to accept this judgment.

The pursed grimace she put forth to camouflage all this mental activity was intended to be a gracious smile. She would string along with Tessa's odd fancies, humor the poor thing.

"Sometimes they hang themselves," she tittered.

"Who—ah—oh, yes! What I meant, Verbena, is that artists are peculiar. They get so intense about their work, and then when their paintings don't sell and nobody even wants to look at them—" She tilted her dark eyebrows significantly.

Verbena smiled.

"I know who you're thinking about. You're thinking about the young man in the flat upstairs."

"Mr. Teufel. Perhaps. He *is* an artist—and come to think, I don't imagine he sells many paintings."

"He doesn't sell any," Verbena corrected. "We were discussing him only yesterday at the Ladies' Sewing and Bridge Club."

"Oh?"

"Mrs. Abernathy's husband knows all about him. He can't pay his rent. He can't pay for anything. He tried to get a loan from the bank, but Mr. Abernathy wouldn't give him one because of course he has no security. Imagine him trying to put up some of his outlandish pictures as security! Mr. Abernathy said if Mr. Heckle, the grocer, wants to be silly and exchange food for those ridiculous daubs of his, let him. As for Mrs. Abernathy's husband's *bank*—"

"Poor Mr. Teufel."

Tessa wagged her head and poured herself more tea.

"What I say is why doesn't he go to work? Oh, Tessa, there's another seagull on your sign."

"Let him," Tessa said recklessly. "What else are the dear ladies doing these days, Verbena?"

"Oh, they're doing some marvelous things for the community, Tessa. Our bazaar alone made enough to plant flowers all along the boardwalk over the city dump

and keep the Bird Fanciers going for another year at least."

"Poor Mr. Teufel." Evidently Tessa's thoughts were jammed on an earlier track.

"Why do you keep saying that, Tessa?" Verbena found Tessa's vaguenesses very irritating. What she had really hoped from this tea was to acquire some new tidbit to dispense at the card party tonight. "Surely you must know something about Mr. Teufel by this time, something the rest of us don't. Something *definite.*"

"I never eavesdrop," Tessa said.

"Of course not, but—" Verbena wiggled her cup impatiently.

"But I don't have to with Mr. Teufel. He has a phonograph and he plays it very loudly at all hours. And you can hear every footstep up there, the ceiling is so thin."

VERBENA set her cup down and cocked an ear upwards. "I don't hear a thing."

"Mr. Teufel is sleeping."

"At three o'clock!"

"Mr. Teufel always sleeps 'til four. I imagine he paints better at night, although I always thought artists preferred sunlight to artificial light."

Verbena sniffed. "With the junk he paints I don't know what difference it makes. All great gobs of nasty colors with no pictures to them at *all.*"

"Anyway I wish he'd paint in the daytime," Tessa sighed. "I have to put a pillow over my head to get to sleep, with all that clumping around and that wild music."

"Any visitors?" Verbena leaned forward. "Any *girl* visitors?"

"Not that I know of. I doubt if poor Mr. Teufel has any visitors at all."

"Oh." Verbena lost her gleam. She stood up briskly. "Well, dear, I must run along home and feed Poo."

"Your cat," Tessa said, without relish.

There was more chit-chat at the door, and out along the rococo veranda. Tessa watched her gossip-loving guest mince around the pools of water remaining in the sunken portions of the brick patio and destined for early refills. All at once came a great clatter of army surplus shoes over Tessa's head, down the open stairs leading to the upper flat. Lean Mr. Teufel swooped past Verbena so rapidly that Verbena's umbrella lost its moorings and went skittering and bobbing down the walk.

The artist's gaunt face lifted in the semblance of a smile when he retrieved and handed it back to her. Verbena emitted an explosive little shriek and drew back, as if Mr. Teufel had been a springing cobra.

Mr. Teufel scowled and said, "Boo!"

Verbena fled.

Mr. Teufel looked at Tessa and grinned. Tessa smiled politely, then went in the shop and poured herself another drink from the earthen pot.

After a while, sitting there and watching the day gradually droop and vanish, Tessa became quite tiddly. The sun made a last lavish gesture just before it dipped behind the Farallons. Its burst of brilliance highlighted Alcatraz and the populous hills of San Francisco, and put color to the muddy masses of clouds that hemmed in the East Bay horizon. While this was everyday stuff to Tessa, she was not entirely oblivious to its spectacle, and now, when the brilliance was blotted out and the Bay presented the appearance of something shrouded and good as dead, she shivered. There were seagulls, many seagulls, wheeling ambiguously across the heavy sky. But they were like vultures, and the sound they made, like that last fling of sunlight, only intensified the melancholy assurance of death. . . .

TESSA started thinking about Herb.

It was time to start thinking about him.

She poured herself another cup of sherry from the earthen pot and let him take over her thoughts. He would anyway.

Thinking about her dead husband had its amusing aspects, when you came right down to it. Maybe that was why she allowed him to keep possession of her emotions and her thoughts now, even as he had while he was alive. Oh yes. Herb had been a greedy man that way. He had expected Tessa to give him first consideration in every instance, even in her most secret thoughts. In a way she had, too. And there was no reason to assume that Herb's character had under-

gone any change now that he was dead, even if his physical self had. No, Herb could never change. He would remain as cantankerous, as selfish, as vindictive as ever, until there was no more anything at all.

Of course she had loved him.

He was handsome, bold, amusing. He captured her fancy completely. It was later, years later, when these traits blossomed forth and enveloped her with what was apparently a studied desire to strangle her and crush her.

But Tessa didn't crush easily. For all her flights of whimsy, Tessa was an intensely practical woman. So practical as to drive Herb insane with rage at times. She refused to accept surface excuses and reasons, dissecting each one to its very core. She saw into Herb as if he were made of plastic, and after a while that made him hate her. He couldn't lie to her and foist off cheap excuses or third-class reasoning on her. She always saw what was underneath and indicated she did, in her calm sweet voice.

When his heart went bad—mainly from self-indulgence in spite of his doctor's stern periodic admonishments—he blamed Tessa. She should have stopped him. How she could have done this, particularly with a self-willed individual like himself, was something Herb never bothered to consider. He had to blame somebody, besides himself, so he blamed Tessa. He took it out on her both in petty vindictiveness, and by a constant stream of ill-temper that would surely have crushed and destroyed a less valiant creature than wiry little Tessa.

He lost his handsomeness. The lines in his face which had formerly suggested swaggering boldness turned to visual evidences of mean suspicion and lurking sadism. He couldn't work, so Tessa invested the little money he hadn't squandered or needed for doctors in "YE OLDE GHOSTE SHOPPE." She made it pay, too. Not much, to be sure, but enough to keep them independent, if she were very careful.

One thing association with Herb had done for Tessa—good or bad—it had given her a taste for sherry, even mediocre sherry. There were so many remembered times when it had proved a great solace. But after Herb became really ill, so ill that he could do nothing but sit in his chair and let Tessa wait on him hand and foot while he raged and bellowed about the condition of the world and about Tessa's inadequacies, there was no more sherry. None for Herb. It would have killed him. None for her because Herb couldn't have any. They couldn't afford luxuries, to be sure, but a thimbleful of sherry now and then wouldn't have made much difference. But Herb said no, and it was folly to cross him.

Herb was a dog in the manger other ways, too. He didn't want Tessa to take a stroll down the breakwater, or go to the movies, or have any friends. Every facet of her existence must belong to him.

Tessa wanted an occasional glass of sherry, she wanted to see Gregory Peck's latest, she wanted to hear Verbena's newest gossip. She wanted to very much. But Herb always provided logical (to him) reasons why she shouldn't have these things. And it was so much easier to let him have his way. It was easier to stay home and wait on him and listen to his invalid grumblings, because if she didn't Herb would surely make her pay for it—some way.

THIS insistence on revenge for disobedience was carried to fantastic lengths. Herb was very near-sighted, so near-sighted that he couldn't even read any longer. But he seemed to develop an uncanny second-sight about everything Tessa did. He had to know everything that went on, every tiny little thing. He distrusted all her actions. He would accuse Tessa of stinting him on cream for his gruel. She was saving it for herself—or for somebody who would slip in later. Then he would proceed to take it out on her. Always he must have his revenge, even when the reason for it existed only in his imagination.

Little things, surely. And yet little horrors, piled one on top of the other, *ad infinitum,* can lead to desperation. . . .

Tessa began to dream, and in all her dreams there was no Herb. He just wasn't there. And being essentially a practical person her dreams began to lean toward real-

ity. Herb was near-sighted. For this reason and for selfish reasons he insisted on having a hodge-podge collection of items on a large round table near his chair. Besides his heart medicine, there was salt and catsup and mustard and picture books and a kaleidoscope—and any number of other things.

One day when Herb picked up a vinegar bottle and started spooning vinegar into the water glass Tessa had brought for his medicine, Tessa's dreams began to take definite shape. She knew about the other medicine bottle in the bathroom, the medicine which was not poison but would surely kill a person with a serious heart condition. And she knew just how to provoke Herb into waiting on himself when it came time for his medicine.

Tessa wouldn't kill Herb. Oh, no. But she would make it convenient for him to kill himself.

The dangerous medicine bottle found its way onto Herb's cluttered table. It became an interesting gamble to see just how long it would be before Herb drank some of that, believing it to be his own medicine. Tessa invented excuses for being out of the room at medicine time, then peeked between the dining room drapes behind Herb to see what happened. It was always a breathless moment. Then she would breathe a sigh of relief when Herb picked the good bottle. After several months the strained sigh of relief became just a sigh.

A year or so went by. It seemed longer. Tessa dreamed harder than ever. Not only would she be able to have her sherry again when Herb was gone, but there would be more money to afford it. During this long period of waiting and dreaming Tessa determined that *if* anything happened she would never stint herself. She would go to bed tiddly from sherry every night. She would!

It happened finally and she did.

TESSA put her cup down, regretfully, and prepared to shut up shop for the night. Humming snatches of old songs all mixed together, she took the "Open" sign out of the window, locked the shop door, and snapped off the light.

Outside the seagulls made patterns on the wind. The tide gushed in on the breakwater. Tessa's driftwood sign creaked gently. Tiny drops of vagrant rain smeared the darkness.

Tessa found her way to bed by feeling the walls, the drapes, the familiar jumble of too much furniture. She went to sleep like a baby. There was nothing to prevent. No Herb, with his querulous rasp. No Mr. Teufel, with his wild phonograph music and his clumping. Mr. Teufel was out. And the contents of the earthen pot had made her all warm and cosy inside.

But that warmth wore off—and then something cold, something ice cold, entered the dark room. It was the room Tessa and Herb had shared for so many years. And now the coldness made her shiver and waken. She yawned and half sat up.

"Herb?" she called, after a long moment. "Is that you?"

There was no other sign—only the cold wind. But somehow she *knew*. All those years with him had given her a sixth sense where Herb was concerned. She could feel those muddy gray, half-blind eyes watching her as they had when he was alive. Crafty, suspicious, vindictive.

"Herb!" She was not afraid, no. But she was startled and uneasy. It wasn't nice of Herb to come back like this. Her voice cut the darkness sharply. "I know you're there, sitting in that same chair, just as you always did. Well? Why don't you answer me?"

Still no answer.

All the same she knew he was there in that big ugly chair of his. She had meant to get rid of that chair right after the funeral, but somehow she hadn't got to it.

"Herb Alder! I know you're in this room! You might as well let me see you."

Her neck muscles twitched. She knew something strange was about to happen. It did happen. Even though this middle room was closed in so that there was no stray light from the outside at all she knew just where to look, and she was looking there. The chair began to glow. It was an untidy

unrelated mass of phosphorescence, first, then it took shape and became Herb. She could still see the chair behind him, it was as if he were etched on plastic.

"Took you long enough," Tessa greeted him. "What are you up to? Oh, I see. You are back to spy on me, again. To keep track of everything I do, as you did before. Well, let me tell you, Herb. Last night I went to the movies. With Verbena. Yes, and I've seen her nearly every day since you died. And I've been drinking sherry, too. Lots of sherry, Herb. Like you couldn't have and wouldn't let me have. How do you like that, Herb?"

The figure in the chair didn't like it. It clouded up redly and elongated, as if to reach out for her.

Tessa began to laugh.

"Trying to frighten me, are you? Let me tell you this, Herb. You never did scare me, with all your yelling and snarling. You didn't then and you don't now."

She paid no attention to the ghost's feral gyrations. She had always wanted to tell Herb off. Now that he was dead she could. She flared up in a flame of righteous triumph.

"I put up with you a long time, Herb. With your childish tantrums and your petty suspicions. And your little revenge when you thought I was neglecting you or slighting you. Well, I got my share of revenge too! Do you know how, Herb? Haven't they told you where you are?"

The ghostly figure rippled like so many phosphorescent sea-worms on a glassy night ocean.

"Surprise, surprise, Herb!" Tess chortled, nearly hysterical by now with this supreme adventure of telling Herb off. "It was I who killed you, Herb! It was *I* who put that bad medicine on your cluttered table. I had to wait a long time for you to pick that bottle. But the gamble kept me amused while I waited. What do you say to all that, Herb?"

Herb expressed himself by elongating almost to the ceiling. He made himself into a luminescent tower of rage. His lips moved and although no spoken words came out he seemed to be saying: *I suspected as much. That's why I came back. Now I know for certain and now. . . .*

"What can you do about it now, Herb?" Tessa taunted him. "What can you do?"

She fell back, rocking with laughter.

A faint wisp of light entered the room, a tenuous harbinger of daylight. A blast of freezing cold swept the room and just before Herb vanished, Tessa was sure she heard him rasp:

"I always have my revenge, Tessa. Make the most of your freedom, because you have only until tomorrow night. . . ."

TESSA lagged about her duties the next day. Try as she might she could never quite erase those words from her mind. Her head was fuzzy, too, from over-indulgence in the tea department the day before. She had been a fool to *tell* Herb she killed him! What a stupid thing to do! And now, typically, he wanted his revenge. That ugly rasped threat! *Tomorrow night. . . .*

He wasn't giving her much time, was he?

The more she thought about it the uneasier she became. She hadn't a very clear idea just what Herb could do to her, dead and all. But he would do something. Trust Herb. And it wouldn't be at all nice.

Her frugal lunch of cottage cheese and canned peaches was interrupted by the strident tinkle of the cat-bell over the shop door. She hurried out in front.

"Can I help you?"

It was a young couple, happy honeymooners, trying to match their delirious mood in her quaint little shop, inasmuch as the lowering skies outside did not.

"Tell me, is the shop really haunted?" the girl twittered.

"Yes." Tessa frowned. It used to be rather fun, building up sham gothic romances for tourists. Not now.

"Really?" The new bride bubbled over. Her husband winked at her fondly.

"Who haunts it?" he asked Tessa.

"My husband."

"No!" The bride, fondling her new husband's lapel, assumed interest in the shelf nearest her to hide her smile. "Look, dear. Isn't this just the darlingest little Chinese elephant?"

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"If you think so, sweet. Why does he haunt it?" The young man's lips twitched suspiciously.

"He wants revenge," Tessa found herself blurting. "He was murdered, and he's come back to—"

"Who murdered him?" The young man peeled off a dollar for the elephant.

Tessa took it, staring at him. "Nobody!" she snapped. "It's just a story!"

They left, the bride cooing about the quaintness of the shop and the darlingness of the driftwood sign and wasn't Tessa the cutest thing. Tessa picked up the nearest object to hand with the idea of hurling it after them. It turned out to be the earthen pot, and it wasn't quite empty. So she sank back in the chair by the window and had a slug.

Two more and she began to relax.

She must think, think, *think*. What did Herb have up his ghostly sleeve, and how was she going to circumvent him? It was past one already. Not much time. . . .

Think fast, Tessa!

Something sifted into her thoughts, interrupting them. Music. Dirge-like music from upstairs. At this hour! Mr. Teufel was actually up at one-thirty, playing his blankety-blank phonograph. The dirge ended and was followed by some wild modern dissonances. Tessa couldn't help listening. After a while it struck her that there was some insidious pattern to Mr. Teufel's selection of music. It all suggested a particular train of emotion. And when a scratchy, banal interpretation of *Good-bye* began to smite her eardrums Tessa leaped to her feet.

By the time it repeated for the third time Tessa was upstairs peeking through the bamboo slats into Mr. Teufel's studio.

"Mr. Teufel, no!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't do that!"

The young artist was inside, busily engaged in hanging himself from the middle rafter.

TESSA banged on the door without result, so she whipped out her own door keys and tried them. One of them, with the added impetus of a severe inward push, sent her plunging through.

The studio was sizable but dreary. The bare floor made it ice cold, and the artist's furnishings consisted mainly of nail kegs and orange crates. Somehow the gay bohemian dash was utterly lacking. True, there was a half-completed oil on his easel, but the canvas had been slashed across as if in a spasm of despondent rage.

"You stop that right now," she told the emaciated young man on the nail keg. Mr. Teufel was endeavoring to thrust his head

into an ill-made noose of clothesline rope.

"Why should I?" he demanded, scowling down at her.

"For one thing you're not doing it right," Tessa told him. "Always put the noose around your neck first, then wrap the rope twice around the rafter, overloop, and—never mind!" she finished off tartly.

"What are we waiting for, oh, my heart?" queried the tenor dismally. *". . . the leaves must fall, and the lambs must die. . . ."*

Tessa snapped him off. His voice deepened and mushed out and vanished. The artist stared at her sullenly, then collapsed his lanky frame to a sitting position on the keg. Tessa marched about the room briskly. Mr. Teufel's studio was an exact replica of her own bedroom, except for the lack of furniture and the rafters. Paint it up a little, apply a few rugs and pictures, and it would be livable.

Tessa turned her attention to the artist.

"You make an awful amount of noise nights," she reprimanded him. "Don't you realize you're supposed to sleep nights and work days?"

"Then why didn't you let me go through with it?" he demanded bitterly. "Suppose you go downstairs now and forget what you saw." He brightened perceptibly.

"That wouldn't help," Tessa said. "You need furniture. The place is like a barn."

"I need a lot of things—including talent." He got up and began to pace. The clump of his army surplus shoes on the bare floor was all too familiar, although easier to take here than downstairs. Pacing up and down was, then, one of the best things Mr. Teufel did. And his self-expressed lack of talent was the bone of contention.

"Who says you have no talent?" Tessa's sharp eyes traveled to a nearby corner, to a heap of canvases carelessly tossed therein. They, like the one on the easel, had been slashed across.

"Everybody says so," the artist growled irritably. "Yesterday was my last chance to prove to myself that I might someday be an artist, even a passable good artist. A critic from Paris was visiting San Fran-

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cisco. All the others said I stink, but Charles Demeaux is notoriously aloof from them. He helped a friend of mine once, a nobody like me, just on the strength of what he saw in his paintings. My friend told him about me, and yesterday a letter came saying Charles Demeaux would see me if I could get over there yesterday, as he was leaving today. I waited until twelve-thirty last night in the rain, until he came home from the ballet. Demeaux was very kind. He fed me I don't know how many crepe suzettes and how many glasses of wine. But when it came to my paintings—"

"He didn't like them?"

A spasm of utter misery crossed the artist's gaunt face. "He didn't say it like that. He was too kind, too polite. But that's what it boiled down to. No talent. No expression. No future in art. Nothing!"

Mr. Teufel was plainly a man obsessed. His world had crumbled. Tessa made a tentative effort to cheer him up.

"There must be other critics. Maybe you are ahead of your time."

"They all pretend that." Mr. Teufel's lip curled. "Not me. At least I can be honest with myself. I'm no good. I never have been and I never will be."

"Of course I don't exactly understand—" Tessa said soothingly.

"No, you don't!" Mr. Teufel raged. "You don't know a damn thing about it, so why don't you get the hell out of here and leave me alone? Nobody understands anything! The world is full of sadistic morons who pretend to mean well. Bah! Bring on your atom bombs! The sooner the better!"

Tessa's sharp eyes widened, then closed.

"Well?" Mr. Teufel glared at her scornfully. "Aren't you going to go call the police or something?"

"Nope," Tessa said. "I've got a job for you."

Mr. Teufel's expression told her what he thought of work. Tessa just waited.

"Well, if I'm forced to delay my departure I guess I'll have to eat sometime. What kind of a job?"

"I want you to help me move some furniture. Yes, I'm giving it to you, Mr. Teufel—in return for a small favor."

TESSA slept well that night. She went to sleep brimming over with great satisfaction in having done a good deed. There was nothing, she told herself before Morpheus took over, quite as edifying to a human being as having performed a kindness for another human being.

Near dawn she woke with a start. The thought that awakened her was the illusion that she had missed her cue, that her alarm clock hadn't gone off, that she had left a dangerous heater burning all night. *Something. . . .*

And yet full consciousness assured her it was actually none of those things.

The springs creaked as she hiked herself up on the pillows. She cast her eyes about the darkness but she saw no shred of light anywhere. It was as if she had just missed hearing something.

"Herb?"

Her whisper vibrated into the dark, but there was no answer.

Then it came, a far-off sound like a sigh. Or was it only a seagull calling mournfully over the dark waters? Tessa chose to think it wasn't a seagull. She folded aside the covers and slid her legs down on the shag rug. Her feet groped for her sheepskin-lined slippers and invaded them. Without snapping on a light she found her robe and wrapped it around her. A habitual toss of her long black hair to unsnarl it from the collar and she went to the outside door.

She idled a second or two, listening to the swirling sucking noises the tide made as it drained away from the rocks, then she pattered to Mr. Teufel's door and listened.

She heard nothing.

She applied her key and pushed. . . .

There had been sounds in there, mysterious sounds, and movements. She could sense their aftermath. Now there was only darkness and the cold swirling of air, as if a grave had opened and closed.

"Mr. Teufel!" she called across the room.

She knew exactly where the bed was. She knew just where everything was, inasmuch as she had given Mr. Teufel most of this furniture and had helped him arrange it.

"Are you there, Mr. Teufel?"

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WEIRD TALES

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Still no answer.

"Herb?"

Nothing.

TESSA took a deep breath and pulled the string that switched on the ceiling light. The room leaped harshly to life. Ah. There was Herb's big chair, which she had given Mr. Teufel. And by it was Herb's old table, the one that used to be so cluttered. All there was on it now was an empty bottle.

There was no label on the bottle, none at all, but it looked like some kind of medicine Herb had taken at one time but which a normal heart could never stand. It was rather careless of Tessa not to have thrown it out, and to have scrupulously removed the label.

She didn't touch it. There would be fingerprints.

The bed was quite a mess, as if Mr. Teufel had threshed about in the throes of great misery—or under the hypnotic influence of some demanding spectre. But now that he was dead Mr. Teufel looked so calm, so peaceful, so happy with the world—or to be leaving it.

Tessa smiled there a moment, as at some teasing memory. Then she stepped softly out on the veranda and locked the door behind her. The sky was brighter now. There would be sun today, bright sun.

Tessa leaned on a rococo pillar and sighed. If Herb hadn't been quite so insistent on his revenge— Anyway, now he could rest in peace. And so could dear Mr. Teufel. He had been so definite about destroying himself, and who can stop a man from doing that if he has firmly made up his mind? And it was so much nicer than hanging himself, so neat. No bother for anybody.

Herb had followed his cue to perfection. His ironic revenge had consisted of forcing Tessa to drink medicine that would kill her, too. Only Herb couldn't know that Tessa had got Mr. Teufel to exchange flats with her this afternoon, and poor Herb was so nearsighted—

The Eyrie

(*Continued from page 6*)

of that "batch," but not us. We have been receiving some variation of this promise every week for the last three months—sometimes word of an impending cover is included—but that is all we get. We are holding a good story (all set, too) for the cover, we are holding our readers at bay about the promised WEIRDISMS, we are holding our breath, but so far to no avail.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I am quite glad you have decided to reinstate the letter department, always one of your magazine's better features. A mag with no letter column seems empty and lifeless, somehow. Please keep it in. Please let us see more of Dolgov on the covers. . . . Clark Ashton Smith, one of this reader's favorite contemporary poets, appears in WT *only tooseldom for me. His latest poem had his usual fine imagery, mood, and colorful choice of words, although I can't completely admire the poetic form. Keep up the poems, though. Good luck with future issues!*

Lin Carter
1734 Newark St. So., St. Petersburg, Fla.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I think the July issue is in most ways, an improvement. You keep a nice variety of writers, the style of Quinn always a bit sentimental (perhaps better described as morbidly sentimental), balances nicely with the English stories of H. R. Wakefield, and all the other regulars. I only wish Quinn would bring Jules de Grandin* onto the scene more often. . . . I suggest a forecast of the next issue notice each time you make up the contents.

Bob Barnett,
1107 Lyon, Cathage, Mo.

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The Editor, WEIRD TALES.

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The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

On the science-fiction vs. fantasy controversy, I want to throw my vote solidly on the fantasy side.

The world is now filled with science-fiction, while there is (to my knowledge) only one WEIRD TALES. *It's quite bad enough, getting* WT *only every two months. If, in addition half of it is to be given over to stories of a kind that can be found in half a dozen other publications, that's just too much.*

As you doubtless know even better than your readers, good stories of fantasy and the supernatural are hard to come by. If you give us what your title stands for and we pay our money to get, we fans of the supernatural will be faithful to WEIRD TALES.

James W. Hoffman,
Holmes, Pennsylvania.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I want to compliment your magazine on the improved quality of your stories. Years ago I read the magazine, but quit because of the horror stories which had a very bad effect upon my mind.

Recently I became interested in science-fiction and fantasy, and began buying the magazines again, and among them your July issue.

I liked the story "Shallajai" very much, and wish you would print many more like it. It was good fantasy with truth as a basis, and you cannot fail when you print stories of that type. I do not like your covers, nor illustrations, for they are definitely horror stuff, and as such should not be printed for the greater good of the common welfare. I believe the science-fiction-fantasy field is under the guidance of evolutionary forces, and as such will grow up into something that will be uplifting and noble. It has a great future, and will surely evolve out of the lurid and horrible. There is much for mankind to learn of the etheric worlds, and of himself if you please, but it is for his good and not for his detriment as horrors are.

(Mrs.) Naomi Holly,
Colton, California.

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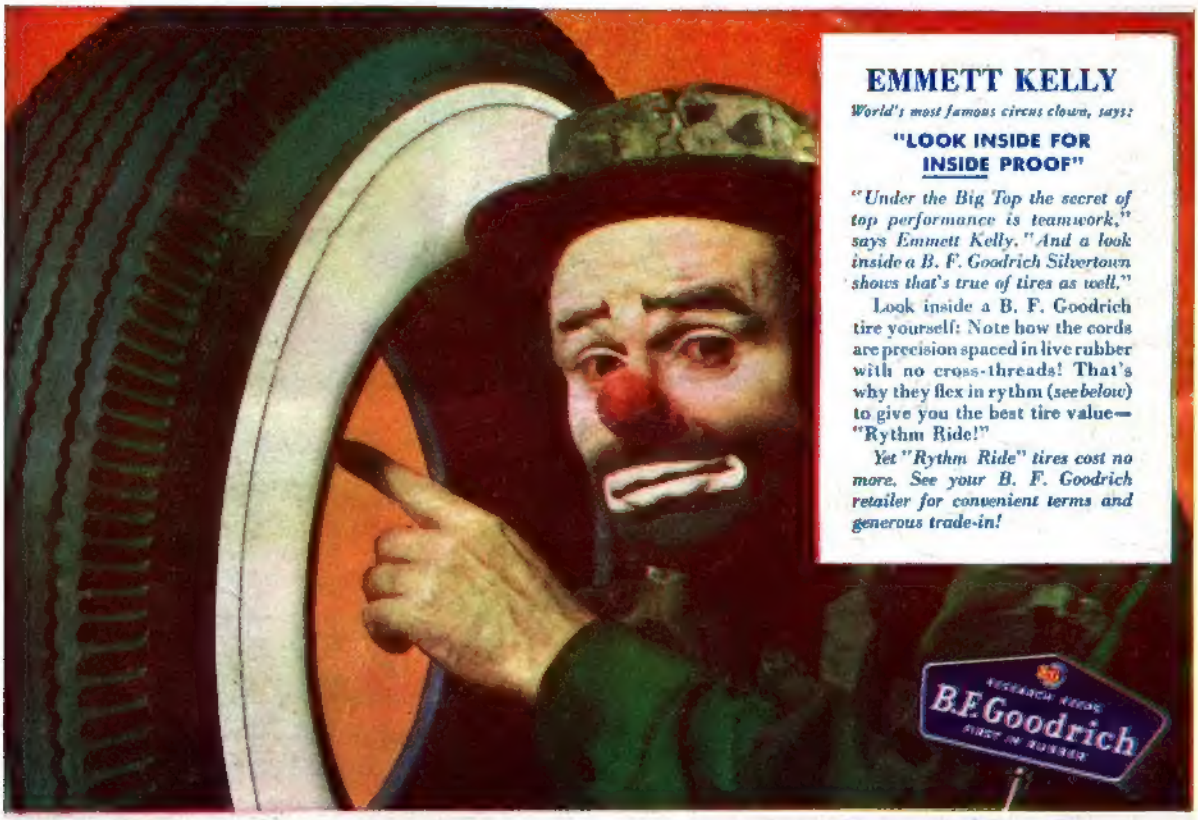

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